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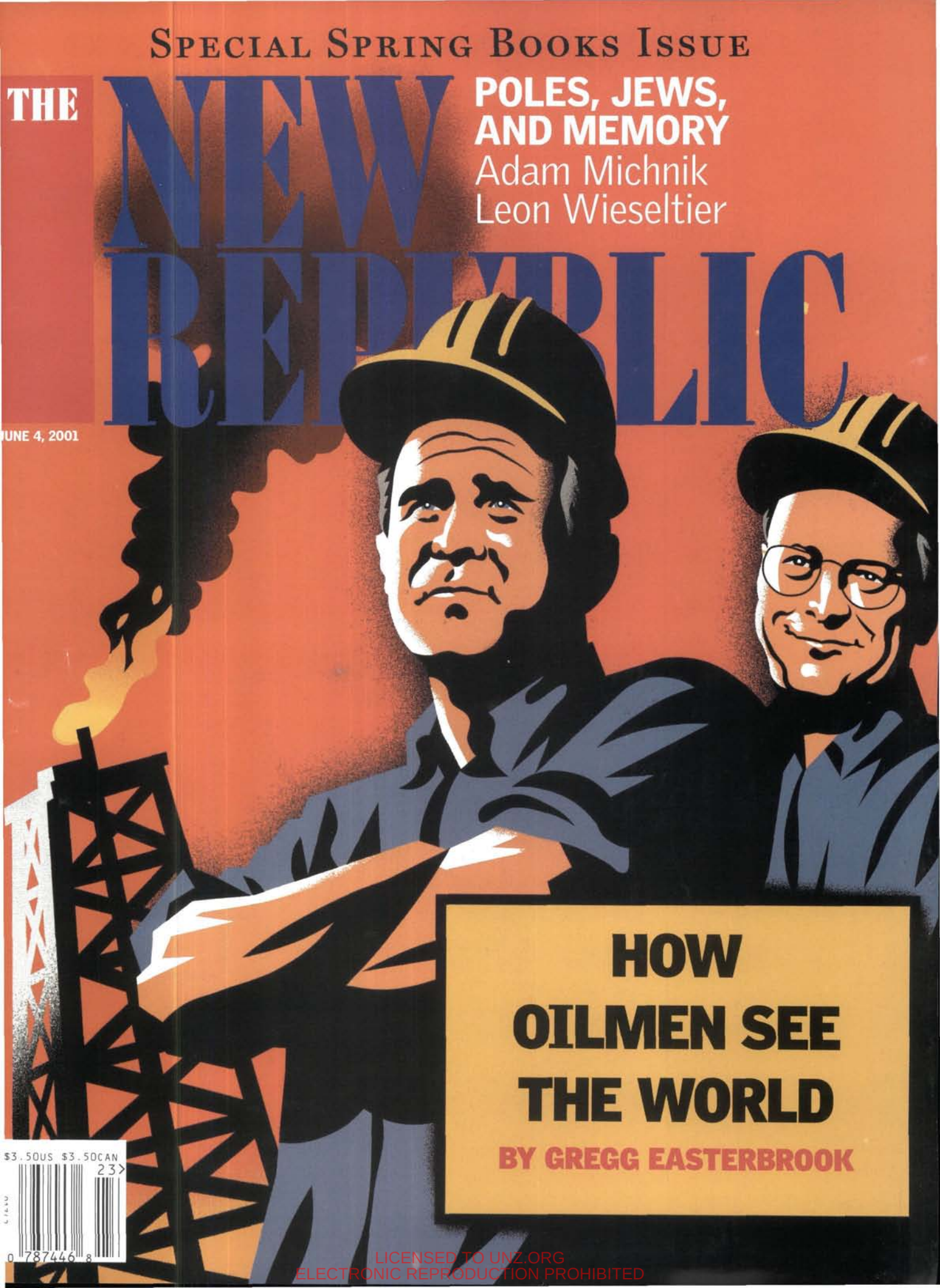
JUNE 4, 2001



## HOW OILMEN SEE THE WORLD

BY GREGG EASTERBROOK

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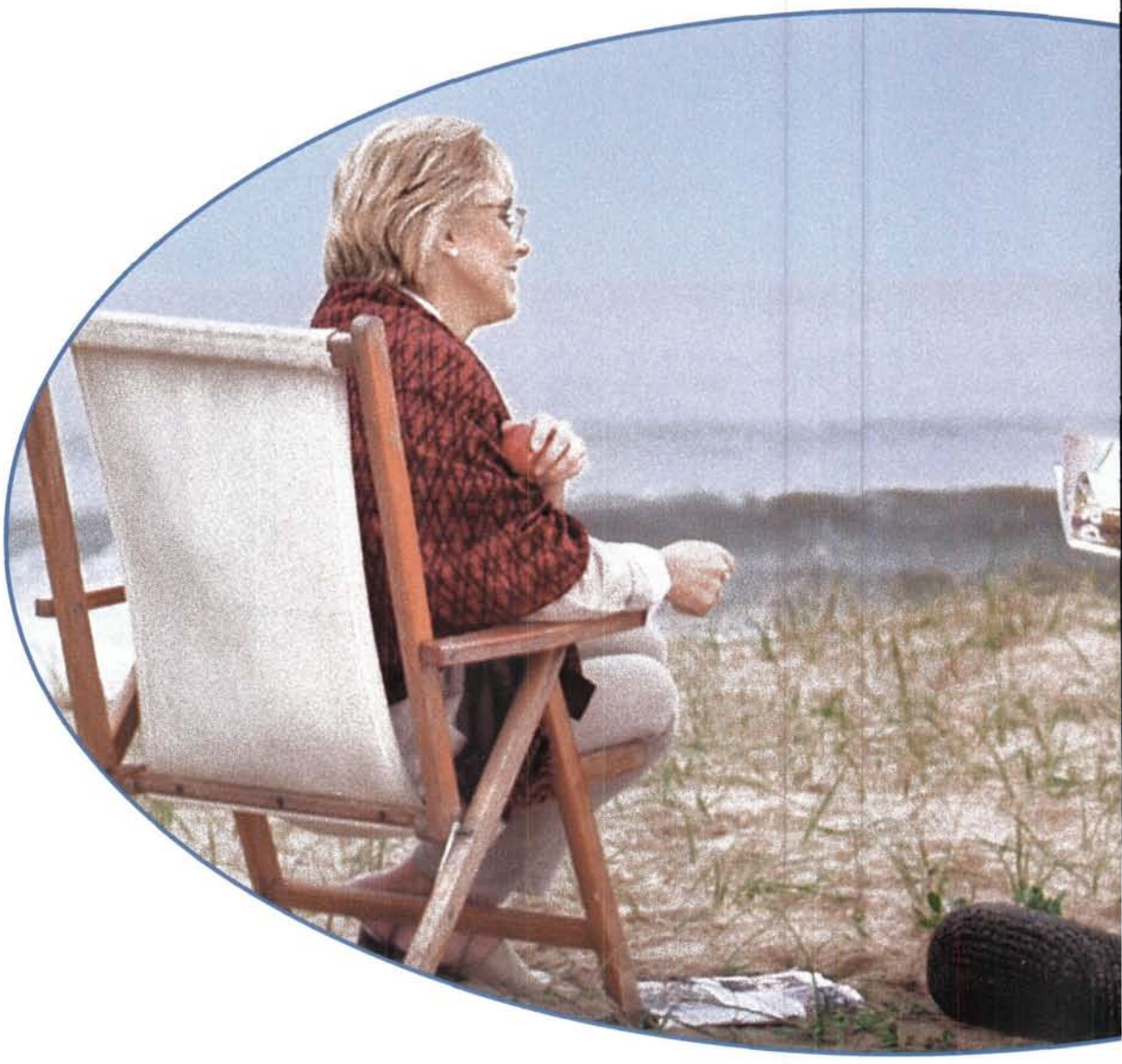
Because our sisters have heart disease, too.



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THE NEW REPUBLIC
*A Journal of Politics and the Arts*

WASHINGTON, D.C.
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## Hidden flaw

TO THE EDITORS:

Jonathan Rauch's "Law and Disorder" (April 30) ignores the fundamental flaw of Hidden Law: It distributes favors unequally, usually based on the pocketbook. The gentility can sneak their daughters out of the state or out of the country to obtain an otherwise illegal abortion; the less fortunate cannot. Opposition to Hidden Law derives from a desire for equity and the protection of the less powerful, not from the puritanism Rauch cites.

I share Rauch's distress at the legalistic extremes of our day. I would not, however, exchange the bureaucratic excesses of the present for the unfairness and risk rampant in the heyday of Hidden Law.

CHARLES GUTFELD
*Oak Park, Illinois*

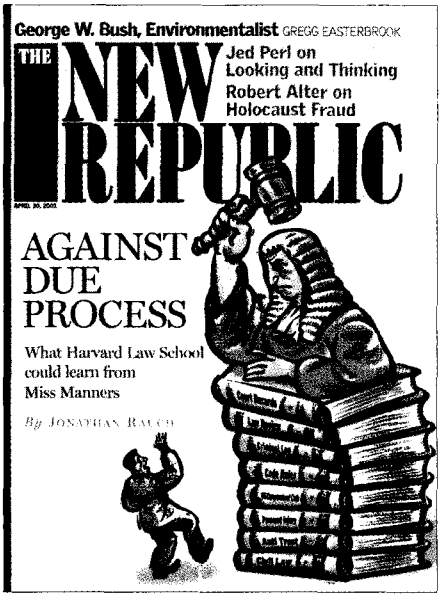
## Unwise

TO THE EDITORS:

Sometimes the conventional wisdom is right ("CW▲," by Franklin Foer, TNR, March 19); sometimes my friend Gregg Easterbrook is wrong ("Health Nut," April 30). These trends converge in Easterbrook's effort to defend George W. Bush's environmental record. First, Easterbrook sticks up for Bush's decision to suspend former President Clinton's regulations on arsenic. But the 1 percent increased cancer risk that Easterbrook cites is more than enough to justify regulatory action (and fails to reflect non-cancer risks, such as damage to the central nervous system). And more than 13 million Americans live in those "few areas of the country" where arsenic exposure is a problem.

Easterbrook also argues that Bush's abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol was a continuation of the Clinton-Gore approach to global warming. The Clinton administration accepted the science of climate change, proved that economic growth and greenhouse-gas emissions growth need not go hand in hand, and worked hard to negotiate rules under the Kyoto Protocol. (I took part in those efforts.) By contrast, the Bush administration has questioned the conclusions of the world's leading climate scientists, dismantled the White House Climate Change Task Force, promoted policies that will push U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions sharply upward, and rejected the Kyoto Protocol without consulting even our closest allies.

Finally, Easterbrook fails to mention that Bush has broken at least three campaign promises on the environment—on carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, funding for national park maintenance, and funding for the Tropical Forest Conservation Act. Republican presidents are responsible for many of our nation's most important environmental achievements. There's still plenty of time for President Bush to join the strong bipartisan tradition of environmental protection in this nation.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AGAINST DUE PROCESS
What Harvard Law School could learn from Miss Manners
By JONATHAN RAUCH

DAVID SANDALOW
*Former Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Environment, and Science*
*Washington, D.C.*

TO THE EDITORS:

I sympathize with Gregg Easterbrook's point that Bush has been wrongly blamed for environmental decisions that should be attributed to Clinton. However, I fail to see how this exonerates Bush. Since when is perpetuating an imprudent status quo acceptable? Additionally, Easterbrook's statement that "Europe didn't want to do anything about the greenhouse effect but wanted the United States to take the blame" is preposterous—507 million Europeans use less energy than 280 million Americans. While European governments rely on gasoline taxes, policy changes, and excellent public transportation to lower energy demand, the United States looks to supply ever more energy to its citizens.

SCOTT ESPOSITO
*Berkeley, California*

## Climate change

TO THE EDITORS:

Lest I be perceived as soft on communism or as pacifist, I must take issue with Lawrence F. Kaplan's portrayal of me as a "professional conservative" who is squeamish about criticizing the Bush administration's handling of the EP-3 incident ("Cavemen," April 30). The gravamen of my column was Bill Kristol and Robert Kagan's hyperbole in calling the EP-3 incident a "national humiliation." Yes, I referred to Kristol as "Winston Spencer Kristol" to suggest the delusional world he seems to inhabit despite the end of the cold war. Kaplan quoted me accurately, but in my very next sentence I declared that "I share their [Kristol and Kagan's] impatience with Beijing." I went on to suggest the delusional world the Chinese military seems to inhabit. The world has changed since 1939 and 1989. Diplomacy and global commerce can replace blood and guts—at least for now.

R. EMMETT TYRRELL JR.
*Editor-in-Chief*
*The American Spectator*
*Arlington, Virginia*

## No vacancy

TO THE EDITORS:

Michael Crowley should not assume that the Democrats will have a 51 to 49 majority in the U.S. Senate should Senator Strom Thurmond die or resign before the end of his term ("Strom?," April 30). Republicans in South Carolina's House of Representatives have introduced H-3673, which provides that "the Governor may fill the [Senate] vacancy by appointment of a person who has declared himself to be a member of the same political party as the immediately preceding Senator who vacated the office." In other words, Governor Jim Hodges would have to appoint a Republican. You have to give the GOP full marks for creativity.

JOHN H. WILDE
*Greenwood, South Carolina*

## Conspicuous waste

TO THE EDITORS:

In his valuable review of Natalie Zemon Davis's book *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* ("Past and Presents," April 30), Peter N. Miller extols Marcel Mauss as a sociologist who explored anthropology to unearth the primitive exchange relations that illuminate modern society. A quarter-century before Mauss, a contributor to THE NEW REPUBLIC, Thorstein Veblen, analyzed the practice of potlatch and similar gift rituals among Polynesian islanders and showed how conspicuous waste functioned as a sign of strength. "The evils associated with the market," writes Miller, "were rooted deep in human psychology, in the fundamental desire to be well-liked." Veblen saw gift-giving as a way to be well-feared.

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS
*New York, New York*



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# A big cat coming back?

Prospects for the Amur tiger in the Russian Far East looked gloomy in 1994. Only 200 to 250 of the big cats still survived in the wild, and poachers were killing 50 to 75 tigers a year.

Respected biologists predicted extinction of this tiger subspecies by 2000, and they weren't any more optimistic about the four other subspecies elsewhere in Asia.

Today more than 400 wild tigers live in Russia, and experts believe the population will continue to increase — and, with luck, even double.

The Save The Tiger Fund (STF) and the work of dedicated organizations and individuals are the key reasons for this dramatic turnaround in Russia. Since the fund was started in 1995 as a joint effort of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Exxon Mobil Corporation, it has invested more than $8.3 million in 142 tiger conservation projects worldwide.

"Tigers are in fairly good shape where we have good science-based conservation programs," says John Seidensticker, chairman of the Save The Tiger Fund and senior curator at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. "But the tiger's overall status in the wild remains fragile. We have to continue our efforts."

Tigers are important, Seidensticker emphasizes, because they are an "umbrella species." When we save the large habitats needed for tigers, we also save many other animals and plants.

**Saving tigers means saving habitat, which saves many other animals and plants**

In Russia, more than $1.6 million in STF funds have been used to help scientists track and monitor tigers, to buy land to increase tiger habitat, to educate people who live in forest communities and to help organize antipoaching teams.

"Much of our work would simply not be possible without the Save The Tiger Fund," says Dale Miquelle, a Russian-based biologist with the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Another success story is Nepal, where the tiger population may also double during the next 10 years. A model program in the Royal Chitwan National Park contributes up to half of all tourist revenues to villagers for schools and clinics. Local people now guard against poachers and are helping to reforest degraded lands.

"In the past, tiger conservation involved finding land for a park and then moving any people who might live there," says Whitney Tilt, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's director of conservation programs. "Now we understand that the future of the tiger depends on finding ways for people and tigers to live together."

For more information about how you can help improve the odds for tigers, write to the Save The Tiger Fund, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, 1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. You may also call 1-800-5TIGERS, or visit the fund's Web site at www.5tigers.org.

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# TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

## Clothesline

ON MAY 22, COLIN POWELL leaves for Mali, South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda to inaugurate the Bush administration's Africa policy. Actually, he's inaugurating the Bush administration's *second* Africa policy. The first one was exemplified by candidate Bush's comment, in an interview with Jim Lehrer, that as president he wouldn't intervene militarily in Africa because "it doesn't fit into the national strategic interests." I kind of liked that remark. It was one of the few times in the campaign when Bush lived up to his pledge to introduce a new spirit of honesty into Washington politics. Of course Bush didn't care about Africa—his foreign policy tutors were realists, convinced that the Clinton administration had diluted American power by turning foreign policy into "social work." People who wanted to withdraw American troops from Bosnia weren't about to send them to keep the peace in Angola.

That view may not be right, but if you hold it, it's far, far better to say so than not to. The Clinton administration tried to have it both ways, vowing empathy while pursuing a policy of neglect. The vile result (as Ryan Lizza explained in "Where Angels Fear to Tread," TNR, July 24, 2000) was that, in order to maintain the pretense that it wouldn't tolerate mass slaughter in Africa, the administration tried to cover up evidence that such slaughter was taking place. The people of Rwanda and Sierra Leone would have been better off had America told the truth, which was that they were on their own. So Bush's first Africa policy—call it "honest indifference"—represented a modest improvement over what came before.

But the press didn't see it that way. Journalists pounced on Bush's statement as evidence that he wasn't really an internationalist and that compassionate conservatism was a lie. The statement threatened to become W.'s equivalent of brother Jeb's famous quip during his 1994 campaign that if elected governor, he would do "probably nothing" for black Floridians. So Bush, with help from Powell, has initiated a second—much more Clintonian—Africa policy. Message: "We care." I don't believe that message is any truer than it was under Clinton. But I have a suggestion for how the administration could prove me wrong.

A decade ago, dictators ruled just about every country in sub-Saharan Africa. These men stayed in power largely because of aid from either the United States or the Soviet Union—aid that enabled them to pay off their militaries and to bribe their potentially combustible urban middle classes with a bloated state that gave them government jobs and kept food prices low. Then the Soviet Union fell. And when Moscow stopped competing for supremacy in Africa, the United States began conditioning its aid on good government—in other words, demanding that African dictators stop using the money for all the things that had been keeping them in power. The result was that during the 1990s most of these dictators fell. And their demise has left Africa with two relatively new political phenomena: states governed by fairly democratic leaders under the tutelage of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and states in which the center has not held and dictatorship has given way to civil war.

The Bush administration isn't going to do anything about the latter—train-wreck countries like Somalia, Congo, and Sierra Leone. But it could do something quite important for the former. For these countries—such as Ghana and Mali—to start down the path that South Korea and Thailand have traveled, they need to move from primary to secondary commodities. They need to shift from merely exporting products that grow in fields or lie in the earth—coffee, sugar, bauxite, copper—to exporting the more valuable manufactured goods upon which a country can build a real middle class. The lowest rung on that secondary-commodities ladder is textiles—what industry people call "stitch-and-sew." Exporting textiles doesn't require highly specialized education or technology, but it is manufacturing. And, over the past several decades, developing countries that export manufactured goods have grown far more rapidly than those that export agricultural ones; indeed, textiles are a big part of the reason China's growth rate has been so high.

Stitch-and-sew is the kind of work Africa needs to get into, and it's the kind of work America is gradually leaving behind. Indeed, because stitch-and-sew can be done so cheaply in the Third World, American manufacturers can't compete. Those that survive do so only because of American protectionism—tariffs that keep foreign textiles from entering the U.S. market. Last May, after years of wrangling, Congress passed a bill to cut those tariffs for economically reforming African countries. But, in the face of opposition from powerful textile-state senators (for instance, renowned free-marketeer Jesse Helms), the bill was severely watered down. The legislation cuts tariffs on a mere 1.5 percent of U.S. textile imports. (Within eight years that number will rise to a still-meager 3.5 percent.)

Why doesn't President Bush mark his secretary of state's inaugural visit to Africa by calling for the elimination of American textile subsidies against the continent altogether? It would be a chance to show that compassion and free-market conservatism really can go hand in hand. It would show the world—which wants more than ever to view the United States as a selfish bully—that we still have a generous, enlightened view of our self-interest. It would put pressure on Europe to reduce its own shameful anti-African tariffs.

And, perhaps most delicious of all, it would expose the ugly side of the anti-globalization movement. UNITE, the textile-workers union, has become ultra-hip on many college campuses in recent years, having helped to orchestrate the anti-sweatshop crusades that were the late '90s answer to the divestment protests of the '80s. But UNITE is also one of the most vociferous opponents of any effort to open American markets to African textiles. UNITE says producing cheap clothes under difficult conditions will leave African workers exploited like their counterparts in Malaysia and Guatemala. But the harsh reality is that the problems of workers in Malaysia and Guatemala are problems just about every African country would love to have, which is why almost every African government endorsed last year's free-trade bill. The truth behind UNITE's opposition is that it has nothing to do with its concern for African workers and everything to do with its desire to protect uncompetitive American ones. And those American workers absolutely do need help—job retraining, subsidized health care, child care, and transportation—but not tariffs that keep Africans poor.

By picking a fight over African trade, Bush could expose the self-interest that often lies just beneath the anti-globalization movement's self-righteous rhetoric. Even more importantly, he could help make good on his central promise to the American people: that, in contrast to a president who spoke grandly and broke promises, he will speak modestly and do at least modest good.

PETER BEINART

ANDREW SULLIVAN is on vacation and will return next week. PETER BEINART's column, "Punditry," appears on Mondays at *www.thenewrepublic.com*.



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# Anti-Semitism and The Sin of Silence

President Assad of Syria's vicious anti-Jewish diatribe on a world stage is a fearful example of what happens when the international community and religious leaders around the world fail to speak out against bigotry and hatred.

For a long time the Arab world has been using stereotypical anti-Semitic images, speeches and literature to dehumanize and therefore to delegitimize the presence of Jews as a national entity in the Middle East.

Yet no responsible world or religious leader has taken a stand to condemn this. The world knows all too well that words can kill. Too many lives have been lost by the sin of silence. This uncontested prejudice is no doubt why Assad felt comfortable spewing lies and anti-Semitic accusations while receiving a religious delegation.

It is past time for political and religious leaders worldwide, for all decent people, to stand up and speak out against the blatant anti-Semitism pervading the Arab media. It is destructive to peace and dangerous for everyone.

As part of our continuing mission as the world's leading organization fighting anti-Semitism, racism and all forms of hatred, ADL seeks to expose and counteract prejudice and hatred whenever and wherever they exist. We invite you to find out more about ADL programs and materials by visiting www.adl.org or calling 1-866-STOP-HATE and we urge you to help fight hatred by making a contribution to ADL.

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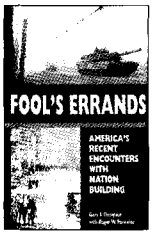


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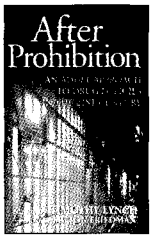


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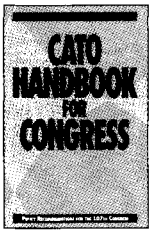


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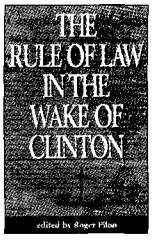


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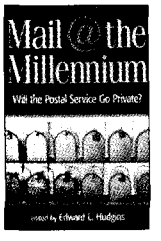


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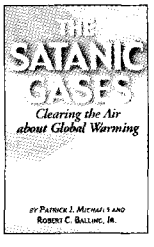


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# Poisoned Chocolates

"Whatever the source, violence will not solve the problems of the region. It will only make them worse. Death and destruction will not bring peace, but will deepen the hatred and harden the resolve on both sides. There is only one way to peace, justice, and security in the Middle East, and that is through negotiation." These words introduce the report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, chaired by George Mitchell, that the American government appears to be making the basis of its new involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflagration. The words are true, true, true; but they are also a little ridiculous in the magnitude of their detachment from reality.

These moral platitudes are succeeded by policy platitudes. The Mitchell-Powell formula—that seems a fair name for it—calls for an immediate end to the violence, followed by confidence-building measures (foremost among them, at least in the way the report has been presented by officials and reporters, is that "the GOI [Government of Israel] should freeze all settlement activity, including the 'natural growth' of existing settlements"), followed by a resumption of negotiations "in the spirit of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements and understandings of 1999 and 2000." For diplomatically speaking, "there is a record of achievement." What in Dennis Ross's name are these distinguished gentlemen talking about? As of last summer, there is a record of failure, diplomatically speaking; and the present crisis is its sanguinary result.

The Mitchell-Powell plan appears to be to erase what is known about the scuttling of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation by Yasir Arafat's theological *jusqu'au-boutisme*, to act as if the Israeli government did not offer the Palestinians a state on virtually all of the territories with a capital in Jerusalem, to proceed as if what was revealed at Camp David was never revealed. This has the effect of detaching the present crisis from its cause, so that the traditional analysis of the peace processors can be protected from all the harsh empirical evidence against it. Suppose negotiations are resumed. Sooner or later they will collide with the Palestinian obsession with the settlements. The Israelis will make concessions, as they did before; and the negotiations will resume. Then they will collide against the Palestinian insistence on sovereignty over the Temple Mount. The Israelis will make concessions, as they did before; and the negotiations will resume. Then they will collide against the Palestinian right of return.... And so on. What reason is there to believe that the exercise will go differently?

The immediate consequence of the new American stirrings, of course, has been Sharon's government's indication that it will drastically reduce its retaliatory actions and its restatement of Israel's position that it will not expand settlements beyond their established lines. We are not troubled by the Israeli restraint. But we are troubled by the recurrence of the old pattern of diplomatic partiality: once again, the pressure falls all on one side of the line. The bad joke is that the peace processors are not putting the screws on Arafat because they, too, have given up on him. In *The Washington Post* last week, Dennis Ross wrote that "[k]nowing Chairman Yasser Arafat as well as I do, I am certain he will never initiate—only respond. But he won't respond to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, lest it appears he is giving in.... Barring a United States or international initiative that provides him a justification for ending the violence, he will let the situation deteriorate in the hope that the international community will have to intervene and rescue him." It is an extraordinary admission. But the Israelis are expected to act as if all this is not the case. They must pretend that they have not given up on him, that he is still their "partner."

"The PA and GOI," the Mitchell Report sagely counsels, "should resume their efforts to identify, condemn, and discourage incitement in all its forms." What do they mean by "resume"? The anti-Israeli virulence in the streets of Palestine is a direct expression of what the Palestinian educational system has taught its young about Israel. Anyway, no sooner had Mitchell and his colleagues concluded their homily than Tayeb Abdel Rahim told the Voice of Palestine that "they threw from their planes poisoned chocolates and some of our children were poisoned." Poisoned chocolates! In its way, medievalism is more terrifying than mortars. Even F-16s are useless against it. ■



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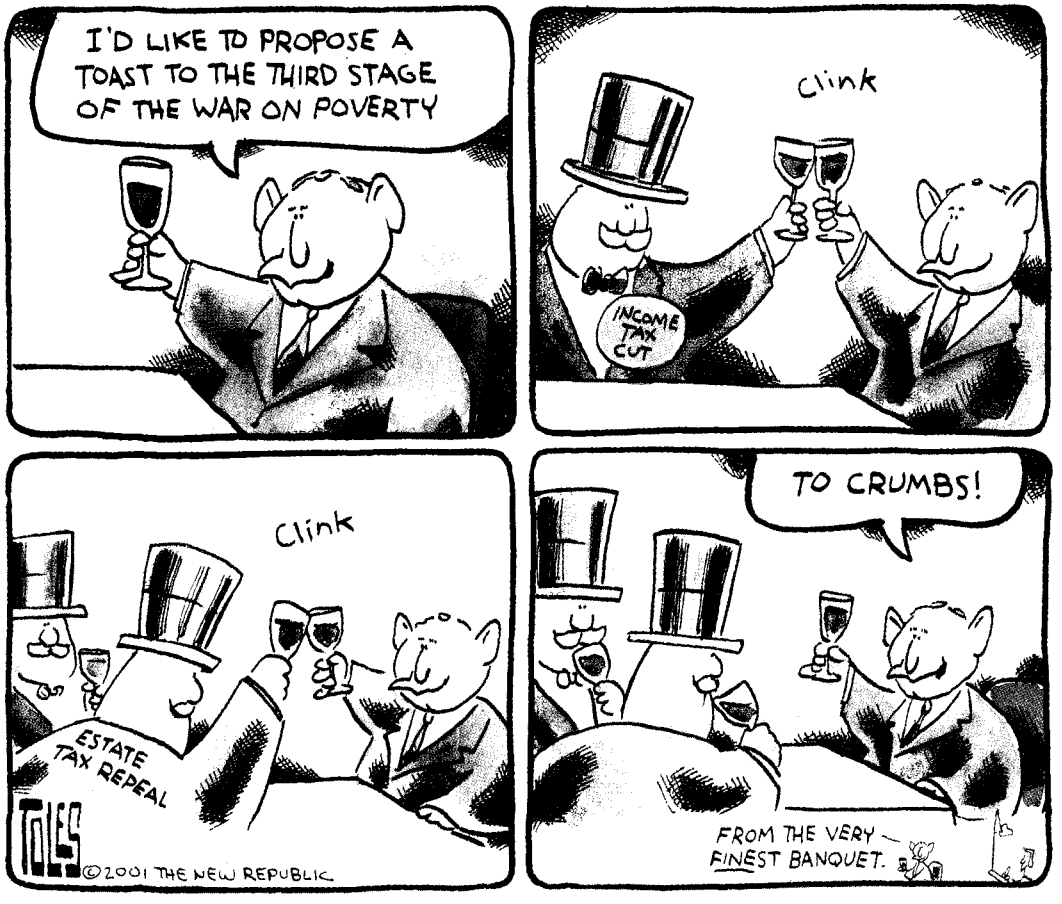
# NOTEBOOK

**BLUE AND GRAY:** The standard line on Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords's expected bolt (at least at press time) from the GOP is that it's part of a long-term trend: liberal northern Republicans becoming Democrats, and conservative southern Democrats becoming Republicans. That's comforting to GOPers smarting over Jeffords's defection. But it's probably wrong. Democrats have actually been doing remarkably well in the South in recent years—winning gubernatorial races in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, and Senate campaigns in Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida. While that's partly because of idiosyncratic factors like the party's alliance with the gambling industry, it's also because Dixie's decades-long swing toward the GOP may be over. Most of the older, conservative, white Southerners alienated by Democratic liberalism have already left the party. And the region's newer demographic trends—migrants from the North, more high-tech workers, a growing Hispanic population—probably benefit Democrats, as long as they stick to the center. Republicans, plotting payback, are invoking Bush-loving Georgia Senator Zell Miller as a potential switcher of their own. But, in Georgia, Democrats aren't exactly a dying breed—they control both U.S. Senate seats and the governor's mansion. The grim reality for the GOP is that if there's any more switching, it will likely be because, as goes Vermont, so goes Maine, and Rhode Island, and....

**HE MEANT, "TAKE HIM OUT TO DINNER":** A few weeks ago in this space, we noted that President Bush's "Good Morning America" gaffe on Taiwan—vowing that the United States would do "whatever it took" to help defend the island nation—was, in fact, preferable as a policy framework to the refined, official approaches offered by the administration. So, too, it seems with Iraq. In December 1999, then-candidate Bush endured much jeering for his off-the-cuff pledge that if Saddam Hussein was found to be developing weapons of mass destruction, America would "take him out." Alas, now that soberer minds have prevailed, the Bush administration has decided instead to take out the sanctions regime and air patrols that have kept Saddam in his box for a decade. Rewarding Saddam for his execrable conduct, the Bush team declared last week that it intends to loosen the embargo against Iraq, banning only select military-related items. And who will enforce these "smart sanctions"? According to the State Department, the task will be left to the countries bordering Iraq—Syria, Turkey, and Jordan. Problem is, none of them has indicated the slightest interest in doing so. Furthermore, despite the insistence of the *New York Times* editorial page, the American plan does *not* require Saddam to allow weapons inspectors back into Iraq as a precondition for relaxing the trade ban. It requires him to do, well, absolutely nothing. Finally, the Bush team has spoken of curtailing the missions of American jets enforcing the no-fly zones in the skies above Iraq. Iraqi gunners, you see, have lately created an inhospitable flying environment by shooting at them. It's a scary thing to say, but perhaps we'd be better off if W. made some of these policy decisions himself.

**WELL, AT LEAST ONE OF THEM DID:** "MIDEAST ADVERSARIES RESIST U.S. PLEA TO CURB VIOLENCE"—front-page headline, *The Washington Post*, May 23

"ISRAEL TELLS ARMY TO WITHHOLD FIRE UNLESS IN DANGER: STEP TOWARD A CEASE-FIRE"—front-page headline, *The New York Times*, same day



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**DAY TRIPPING:** How far will George W. Bush go in his pursuit of the Catholic vote? Judging from the commencement address he delivered at the University of Notre Dame last weekend, he'll go as far as he needs to. "[A]ny effective war on poverty," he intoned, "must deploy what Dorothy Day called 'the weapons of spirit.'" The political logic of invoking the late editor of *The Catholic Worker* is impeccable: Day is beloved by Catholics, a candidate for sainthood. The ideology is a bit more problematic. After all, Day was an anarchist who opposed World War II, refused to pay taxes, wrote for the Communist journal *New Masses*, and railed against the inhumanity of capitalism. William F. Buckley once wrote that Day's extreme leftism "test[s] the promise of Christ Himself, that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against us." Presumably He will be more forgiving if you're just pandering.

**BUT SHE'S ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED SO MUCH IN THE SENATE:** When George W. Bush returned to Yale this week to accept an honorary degree and give the commencement address, 171 members of the faculty signed a petition protesting his visit. According to Bruce Ackerman, the law and political science professor who spearheaded the petition drive, the fuss wasn't about Bush's politics; rather, the faculty protested because the award came too early in Bush's tenure. "I am not at all angry with George W. Bush," Ackerman told Fox News. "The question is ... what justified Yale University in singling George W. Bush out for special distinction after three months in office?" Luckily for Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy—each of whom was also offered an honorary Yale degree during his first year as president—Ackerman wasn't around back then to raise questions about their qualifications. Nor did he or the other faculty members express concern about the propriety of having another newly elected official—who, unlike Bush, hadn't held public office before—speak during commencement weekend. We refer, of course, to New York's junior senator, Hillary Clinton, who gave Yale's Class Day address the day before graduation.

**JOHN EDWARDS TO RUN AS ASIAN AMERICAN IN 2004:** "If Bill Clinton was, as poet Maya Angelou put it, 'America's first black president,' then George W. Bush is trying to sound (and dress) a lot like our first Hispanic president."—David Perlmutter, *San Antonio Express-News*, May 8

"Leaders of the African-American community fondly called Bill Clinton America's 'first black president.' Now, his successor in the Oval Office seems intent on becoming the first Latino one."—*The Christian Science Monitor*, May 14

"Some years ago, the novelist Toni Morrison, in a *Time* essay, proclaimed Bill Clinton America's first black president. Leaving aside the affront to American blacks that Ms. Morrison's conceit carries today, it might be useful to regard George Bush as America's first Hispanic president."—Richard Rodriguez, *The New York Times*, May 21

**GENDER GAP 101:** "Christie Whitman is an upper-class American woman. I come from that milieu. I spent my life, quite happily, in the very pleasant company of such women, and almost none of them have any comprehension of the environment. Almost all of them are averse to science and technology and baffled by it. And they clutch at the pretentious irrationality of environmentalism as their countervailing wisdom."—George Gilder, chairman of *The American Spectator*, interviewed in his own magazine, June 2001 ■



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## Is the projected surplus about to collapse?

# Off Budget

*By* Noam Scheiber

In late April, when the U.S. Commerce Department released its data on first-quarter GDP growth, the nation, or at least the nation's financial pages, breathed a sigh of relief. Despite widespread expectations of a contraction, the economy appeared to have grown at a respectable 2 percent annual rate. Consumer spending had shot up 3.1 percent thanks to a surge in auto sales and other durable goods. "Economy's growth proves steadfast although modest," boasted a *New York Times* headline. "Economy beats expectations," crowed *The Washington Post*. Even the sober *Wall Street Journal* talked of an "unexpected rebound in economic growth."

It should have been good news for the White House, too. After all, the administration's ten-year, $1.35 trillion tax cut depends on projections of a massive federal surplus; should the economy fall into a protracted recession, those surplus projections might fall, taking the president's proposal down with them. So why wasn't the White House cheering the news? Why, in fact, was George W. Bush pleading with congressional Republicans to pass the tax cut before Memorial Day and, presumably, before a new round of Congressional Budget Office projections was released? Because, looking more closely, the economic news isn't actually that good. Beneath the recent economic resurgence is a development that could seriously deflate the surplus projections—and soon.

The only way to project budget surpluses ten years into the future is to make predictions about economic growth. And, just as economists have been doing for years, CBO bases its growth assumptions on a combination of three variables: productivity, capital, and labor. That is, CBO assumes the economy can grow if the same number of people work more efficiently, if the same number of people work with more equipment, or if there are simply more people working. In the mid-'90s, CBO—based on its best guesses about each of these factors—forecast potential growth of about 2.6 percent. But by 1999 it was becoming clear that two of those factors—productivity and capital—were overly pessimistic. While CBO had long assumed that the stock of (non-farm) capital was growing at a rate between 3 percent and 3.5 percent, it had grown at an amazing 5 percent each year since 1996. Likewise, information technology was improving (non-farm) productivity faster than the 1 percent CBO had accounted for. So gradually CBO revised both numbers upward, ultimately increasing its overall estimate of potential growth to 3.3 percent.

Some criticized this change as a departure from CBO's traditionally cautious approach (see "False Positive," March 19). Still, CBO's adjustment wasn't far out of line with most private-sector forecasts—with one important exception. Private forecasters had tended to assume that those recent trends would *not* be permanent and that the rate of capital accumulation would level off over the next decade. CBO, by contrast, predicted that stocks of capital would continue to increase at an amazing 5.2 percent—even higher than the rates in recent years. In other words, CBO's $5.6 trillion surplus estimate was based on the expectation that capital accumulation will continue not only at the unprecedented clip of the last five years, but that, on average, it will exceed that clip in each of the next ten years.

Fast-forward to April, when the Commerce Department reported its apparently good news to the country. If you happened to be a CBO forecaster, it also brought a spate of bad news. Despite the economy's reasonable strength, capital spending had lagged. And it wasn't merely a sputter. Overall capital investment had fallen to nearly zero, having increased by 21 percent over the same quarter the previous year. And, while this is, in a sense, a temporary turn, there's reason to doubt capital accumulation can make a serious comeback any time soon. Many economists attribute the rapid accumulation of capital in the late '90s to two things: preparation for the Y2K bug and development of the Internet. With 2000 in the past and the Internet's infrastructure mostly in place, it's tough to see where the additional increases come from (though a shortening of the product cycle—the average life span of products—will help somewhat). There isn't a surplus estimate around that won't take a hit if the trend continues. But it's CBO's estimates, premised on unprecedented increases in capital investment, that could fall the furthest.

To get a rough idea of the magnitude we're talking about, consider the following back-of-the-envelope calculation. With capital expected to increase at a rate of 5.2 percent in each of the next ten years, and with capital's contribution to potential GDP growth at about one-quarter of that figure, capital alone will drive about 1.3 of the 3.3 percent annual (potential) GDP growth that CBO expects. By contrast, if we assume that capital will increase at an average of 3.8 percent over the next ten years (the average between 1951 and 2000, itself inflated by the blip of the late '90s), then the amount of GDP growth due to capital falls to less than 1 percent and the overall rate of growth falls to less than 3 percent. Using the rule of thumb that every 0.1 percent increase in GDP adds $175 billion to the federal budget (over ten years), that lowers CBO's surplus projection by more than $500 billion.

To make things worse, in recent weeks, long-term interest rates have begun climbing upward. Higher interest rates slow capital investment, which slows economic growth. No less important, higher interest rates depress corporate profits—corporations that borrow money have to pay it back at a higher rate—and therefore lower corporate tax revenues as well. Finally, higher interest rates make it more expensive to service federal debt. A one-point increase in interest rates could sap the surplus of an additional $100 billion over the



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# The SAT: Blaming the Messenger

**E.D. Hirsch Jr. is a professor of education and humanities, University of Virginia; distinguished visiting ellow, Hoover Institution; and member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.**

Opponents of the SAT say we don't know what it measures and hint darkly that it smacks of discredited IQ testing. Decades ago, the distinguished psychometrician John Carroll stated, correctly, that the verbal SAT is an "advanced vocabulary test." At a lower level so are other standardized tests in common use such as the verbal portions of the Stanford 9, the ITBS, the CTBS, and, most significant of all, the well-studied AFQT, taken by those who enter military service. The verbal portions of these tests are highly correlated with one another and with real-world competencies in the armed forces, in college, and in the workplace.

Critics of the SAT concede that it was devised to ensure fairness in admission to elite colleges but that it has become unfair to able students who do not perform well on fill-in-the-bubble tests, to those who belong to ethnic groups and so are on uneasy terms with the cultural assumptions of the verbal SAT, and to those whose parents are not rich enough to pay for the expensive SAT courses that claim to raise scores. The result has been ethnically and racially unrepresentative admission to top universities. These sins against equity are compounded by sins against proper educational goals. Instead of prodding students to think about the civil rights movement or Shakespeare's plays, schools now run cram courses to improve performance on standardized tests.

These are reasonable criticisms, but they are accompanied by vague recommendations for better tests that can disclose deeper skills than those measured by the verbal SAT, or for tests that are based on the school curriculum. Yet **no test of "alternative" skills has proved to be fair and valid.** The idea of using tests based on the school curriculum is more promising, but so far no statewide curriculum is specific enough to permit curriculum-based tests that are fair. Until fair and valid curriculum-based tests are developed, it is irresponsible to abandon a test like the SAT that is valid and fair.

I sympathize with the social motives behind this intellectual irresponsibility. I too want able disadvantaged students to have the opportunity to attend top colleges. But SAT critics have chosen the wrong target. The right target is K–12 public education. The most promising alternative to the SAT—curriculum-based tests—are themselves ultimately means for improving scores on the SAT by improving the underlying vocabulary knowledge that the SAT measures. Statewide curriculum-based tests recently introduced in Virginia have already produced a rise in SAT-style verbal tests.

So I agree that curriculum-based tests offer the most promising way for schools to overcome inequities created by class and caste. But **the virtues of curriculum-based tests in no way invalidate the verbal SAT** or similar tests, which are currently the only good instruments to calibrate the accuracy of curriculum-based tests that are offered as alternatives. If school-based tests do not produce rises in the verbal SAT, then something is wrong with the tests and the schools. Blaming the SAT is a short-sighted way of taking the heat off the public schools to provide genuine equality of educational opportunity.

The answers to these problems are clear: measurement and accountability for results, public support of schools that compete with one another, and parental choice of schools.

*— E. D. Hirsch Jr.*

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next ten years in debt service alone.

Which may be why Team Bush wasn't celebrating the recent economic report. Of course, it's possible CBO won't lower its surplus projections when it reworks its estimate this summer—there are lots of ways to tweak the numbers in the face of obvious political pressure. But, either way, more and more economic observers may come to realize that the budgetary house of cards on which the president is basing his tax cut is rapidly collapsing. That tax cut vote can't come a moment too soon. ■

## White House Watch

# Fuming

*By* Ryan Lizza

This was supposed to be a pretty big week for the White House. President Bush's tax cut was supposed to be signed into law. His carefully negotiated education plan was supposed to sail through the House of Representatives. And, after some stumbling, a green-washed energy proposal was supposed to position the president as a friend of conservation and the environment. Instead, House conservatives revolted and tried to rewrite the education bill; Senate Democrats temporarily ground Bush's tax cut locomotive to a halt; and Bush's energy plan was greeted with derision by journalists and a barrage of attack ads by environmentalists. Meanwhile, the press got its first whiff of presidential scandal and reveled in linking an event for GOP donors at the vice presidential mansion with the tackiest fund-raising abuses of the Clinton era. Oh, and by midweek, Bush's party was about to lose control of the Senate.

These isolated incidents may prove to be mere speed bumps. To be sure, Bush will celebrate major victories on taxes and education soon (maybe even by the time you read this). But this week may also mark a turning point: the week the honeymoon between the press and the new president truly ended. The key was the reaction to the administration's energy policy—the first major Bush initiative on which the media refused to buy the White House spin.

Until now, Bush's aides have been masterful at massaging first-day coverage of W.'s major initiatives. Their handiwork was evident as far back as the original release of the tax cut plan in December 1999. Campaign staffers distributed copies to select news organizations the day before Bush formally unveiled it, but reporters had to agree not to reveal the proposal's specifics to economists who might produce a detailed analysis of which income groups received the greatest benefit. (At first, the campaign barred reporters from seeking any reaction to the plan whatsoever.) Reporters were left to rely on anonymous campaign aides who assured them that the tax cut targeted low-income earners. The strategy worked spectacularly. *The Washington Post* reported that the plan's "deepest reductions" went to the "working poor and middle class.... That emphasis on the poor," the *Post* continued, "would mark a clear departure from more traditional conservative GOP tax policy." Now that we've got the facts, of course, it's obvious that Bush's tax cut marks nothing of the sort and that it's overwhelmingly skewed toward the rich. But the Bushies got the media to buy that line when it mattered most.

The strategy worked again when Bush released his full budget in April. The White House aggressively promoted spending increases for education and the National Institutes of Health. It worked. The headline on the front page of *The New York Times* dutifully announced, "First Bush Budget Proposes to Raise Aid for Education." Only later did reporters explain, often deep inside their newspapers, that half the education increase had already been approved by Congress and included in Clinton's budget, and that Bush planned to cut government spending to 15.6 percent of GDP by 2011—a figure used internally at the White House but not included in any publicly released budget documents. This, *The Weekly Standard* correctly surmised, "would be a breathtaking achievement in reducing the size and role of government." But it wasn't until last Monday, with Bush's tax cut victory already a foregone conclusion, that *The Washington Post* reported on its front page that the real importance of Bush's economic plan is that it would dramatically pare down government.

White House aides used the same tactic in introducing Bush's judicial nominees: Stories about their racial and gender diversity (helpfully promoted in a White House fact sheet and a presidential photo-op) trumped coverage of their ideological pedigrees. A *Wall Street Journal* headline, for example, announced: "Bush to Send List of 11 Diverse Nominees for U.S. Appeals Courts to Senate Panel."

There is a pattern in each of these examples: Fundamentally conservative—even right-wing—initiatives are being presented in moderate, even liberal, packaging. The White House seems to think that either journalists are such knee-jerk, anti-GOP liberals that this is the only way to get favorable coverage, or their initiatives are so unpopular that they simply can't promote them on merit alone. Either way, for a while it looked as if the White House had hit on a winning strategy.

At first, the rollout of Bush's energy policy closely followed the script. The core of Bush's plan is to increase the supply of energy, but the White House painted it in shades of green. "What happened in the last couple of weeks is that the president got a hold of it and made it greener," says one White House aide. The day before Bush's speech, the White House message was conservation. The press repeatedly heard that 42 recommendations dealt with conservation, the environment, and alternative fuel, while only 35 related to supply—as if the specific number of proposals bore any correlation to the plan's true emphasis.

But this time journalists didn't buy it. In the press cabin aboard Air Force One early last Thursday, as the president



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flew to Minneapolis to deliver his energy speech, reporters pummeled press secretary Ari Fleischer with questions strongly implying the administration was being dishonest. Reporters (led by David Gregory of NBC and Jim VandeHei of *The Wall Street Journal*) repeatedly asked: Why was Bush holding events at places that produced alternative fuels when the crux of the report was nuclear, coal, and oil? "Will we see the president go to a refinery, or will he go sit on an oil pipeline to talk about this?" a reporter pressed. "What do you say to the Sierra Club that says it would be more honest for you to go visit the sooty coal plant?" Why, someone wondered, was the president "going out of his way to put together photo opportunities at places that don't deal with the central recommendation of the report"? That night, coverage by the three major TV networks was dominated by parts of the plan the White House had sought to mask. ABC summarized Bush's proposal this way: "He wants to drill for more oil on public land, build more nuclear power plants, and use more coal." NBC reported: "The president's report calls for more drilling on public lands across the country and opening up Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas exploration, a renewed emphasis on nuclear power, [and] the construction of at least 1,300 new electric power plants allowing the government to co-opt privately owned land to build more power lines."

One reason the administration's spin flopped is that journalists couldn't resist the obvious story line: that Bush and Cheney are rapacious oilmen paying off corporate benefactors. "This one's particularly tricky because you've got two oil guys running the country," says a White House correspondent for one of the TV networks, explaining the tougher coverage. Moreover, the energy proposal coincided with a growing chorus of criticism that the press has been too easy on Bush—a chorus spurred partly by a widely read article in *The Washington Post* by Clinton reporter John Harris and echoed by Senator Tom Daschle in a recent press conference. "That piece crystallized what had been a Democratic talking point for months," says one White House reporter from a major paper, speaking of the impact of Harris's article. The negative coverage was also fueled by a sharp Democratic attack on the plan and dissension within the ranks of the GOP. Stories leaked out about strategy disagreements between Cheney's and Bush's staffs and about friction between congressional Republicans and the White House.

Finally, the changed tone may result from a fundamental reassessment of Bush that the media has made since he was sworn into office. The conventional wisdom during the campaign, and during the administration's early days, was that Bush was a moderate whose shifts to the right were meant to shore up his base. Now—after his tax cut plan, his Cabinet appointments, and his environmental policy—he is widely seen as a true conservative who moderates his message only when politically forced. That's a more damaging story line—which is why the Bushies have worked so hard for more than a year to make sure the mainstream media doesn't adopt it. But now that it's becoming conventional wisdom, it's likely to stick. For one thing, it has the advantage of being true. ■


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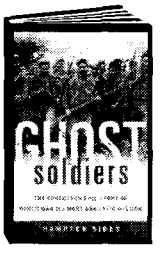


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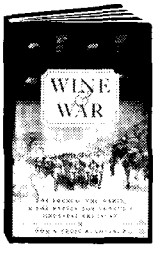


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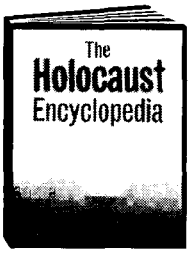


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## Wingate Dispatch

# At Home Abroad

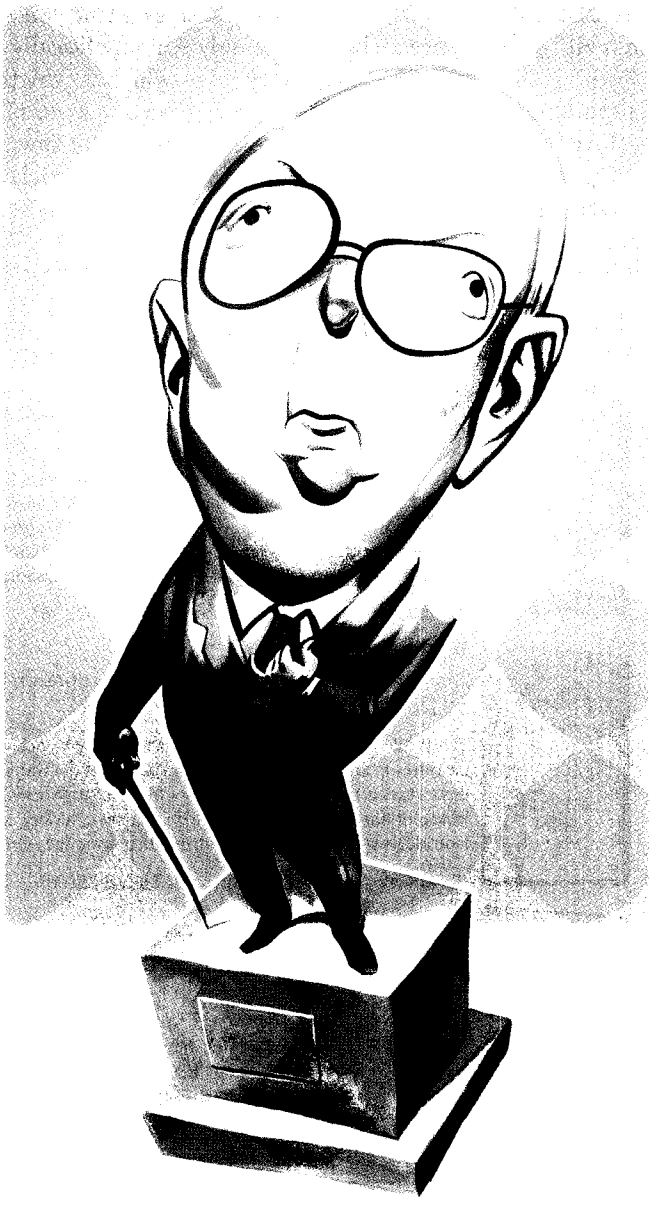
*By* JASON ZENGERLE

IF THERE'S SUCH a thing as rural blight, then U.S. 74, about 30 miles southeast of Charlotte, is it. Bordered mostly by strip malls and strip clubs, the road runs through an agricultural area completely devoid of bucolic charm. But, on a warm Saturday morning in April, someone driving along U.S. 74, passing through the two-stoplight town of Wingate, might have spied an incongruous addition to this bleak landscape. There, standing across the road from a boarded-up Hardee's and the extant-but-not-exactly-bustling Wingate Alternator & Starter Repair, was Margaret Thatcher.

The reason for Lady Thatcher's presence? Jesse Helms. Or, to be precise, the Jesse Helms Center. Although the 78-year-old North Carolina senator is alive and kicking—and currently considering whether to run for a sixth term next year—he has already built himself a shrine. Opened in 1994 and loosely affiliated with Wingate University—where Helms, who grew up five miles down the road in Monroe, attended college for a time during the Depression—the Helms Center houses the senator's papers and mementos. It also sponsors a lecture series at the university, and conferences and essay-writing contests on topics near and dear to Helms's heart, like free enterprise and character education.

Helms himself has no official involvement with the center, but his wife and daughter serve on its board, and the center's president used to raise money for Helms's political campaigns. So it's no surprise that people seeking to show their appreciation of—or to curry favor with—Helms have been extremely generous to the center that bears his name. Various tobacco companies have contributed more than $1 million; the textile magnate and ardent protectionist Roger Milliken has given $250,000; Jack Valenti has chipped in over $10,000. And because the Helms Center is a 501 (c)(3) organization, even foreign governments, which are prohibited by law from contributing to Helms's political activities, have been able to help out: Taiwan has donated $225,000; Kuwait has given $100,000.

Others have simply donated their presence. While the Helms Center hasn't turned Wingate into a prime tourist destination—witness the shuttered Hardee's—it has drawn quite a few high-profile visitors to this red-dirt corner of North Carolina. In recent years, world-renowned figures from Henry Kissinger to Kofi Annan to the Dalai Lama have made pilgrimages. Some, like Clarence Thomas and Dan Quayle, have come out of ideological conviction. Others, like Madeleine Albright and Richard Holbrooke, have come out of necessity, to cozy up to Helms and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee he chairs. (It was in Wingate that Albright made her most desperate plea for Helms's support, presenting him with a T-shirt inscribed SOMEBODY AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT LOVES ME.) In the process, this sleepy town of 3,000 people, seven churches, and one zip code has become a sort of Davos-on-the-Piedmont.



THOMAS FUCHS

Thatcher, who has been friends with Helms since she was a minor MP in the mid-'70s, was in Wingate (pronounced "Win-git" by the locals) to preside over the dedication of the Helms Center's new home. Previously located in a quaint, 3,000-square-foot, white neoclassical house, in late April the center was fêted by Thatcher, Helms, and hundreds of the senator's supporters when it moved into new digs right next door: a just-completed 23,000-square-foot red-brick-and-glass McMansion.

The new building, which cost $3.3 million, is named after A. J. Fletcher, the late Raleigh broadcasting executive who launched Helms's political career in 1960 by hiring the then-little-known director of the North Carolina Bankers Association as a TV editorialist. Over the next twelve years, Helms used his "Viewpoint" segments at the end of the nightly news to wage war



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against the civil rights movement, railing against "Negro hoodlums" and building up a following that would propel him to the U.S. Senate. Other than Fletcher's name on the building, however, there isn't much at the Helms Center about the senator's anti-civil-rights crusade—or about his controversial place in American politics at all. The only real reference to the senator's obstructionist bent is the "NO" stamp sitting on his desk in an otherwise innocuous recreation of his Senate office, complete with a manual typewriter and plaques and pictures hanging on the wall.

There are a few more small hints of Helms's partisanship in another exhibit, where each of the five presidents under whom Helms has served is recognized with a life-size photo, the flag from his home state, a memento, and a time line highlighting important dates from his tenure. The highlights run from the predictable ("1996: Billy Graham awarded Congressional Medal of Honor") to the downright bizarre ("1978: The 'Space Invaders' computer game became the first video mega-hit and spurred sales of the Atari 2600"). But Helms's feelings toward each president—that is, affection for Republicans, dislike of Democrats—are only apparent in the choice of mementos. From Richard Nixon there's a personal note: "Congratulations on your upset victory for Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. I enjoyed seeing our 'friends' in the media squirm!" From Jimmy Carter, on the other hand, there's merely a form letter inviting "Chairman Jesse Helms" to a Carter Center conference on an "agenda for the Americas in the twenty-first century." And alongside Bill Clinton is a critical book about the former president titled *So ... Help Me God*, autographed by its evangelical author, April Shenandoah.

But, if the Helms Center glosses over the senator's domestic politics, it pulls out all the stops on foreign policy. Most Americans might consider Helms a rather insular figure, even a symbol of the parochialism that sometimes defines America's view of the rest of the world. But from the moment a visitor walks into the Helms Center's "President Chiang Ching-Kuo Ceremonial Entry"—complete with a Taiwanese flag—it becomes clear that Helms's view of himself is rather different: The North Carolina senator is an international statesman. The centerpiece of the new building is an exhibit highlighting Helms's January 2000 visit to the United Nations, during which he pledged to allow the United States to pay its U.N. debt if the United Nations agreed to a host of structural reforms. "Just as only Nixon could go to China," reads a quote from Senator Joseph Biden emblazoned on a wall, "only Helms could fix the U.N."

Below the Biden quote hang dozens of photographs of the owl-eyed senator with foreign dignitaries ranging from the well-known (Vaclav Havel and Yasir Arafat) to the not-so-famous (Navinchandra Ramgoolam, former prime minister of Mauritius). The display is no different from the standard "power walls" in offices all over Washington, D.C. But in rural North Carolina it packs a certain punch—especially when you consider that Helms has only traveled abroad a handful of times during his three-decade career. Whether it's in Wingate or in Washington, people have always had to come to him. ■

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## Why Washington needed Jim Traficant.

# Character Failure

*By* David Grann

Long before James A. Traficant became one of the only sitting members of Congress ever indicted for bribery, racketeering, obstruction of justice, and tax fraud, he served as the inspiration for a distinct genre of political feature writing: the Traficant profile. The form included several essential elements: a comic description of Traficant's physical appearance ("he looks remarkably like Captain Kangaroo"), including a metaphor for his disheveled hairdo ("piled in a breadloaf-shaped bouffant") and blue-collar dress ("like a creature from Lake Erie before it was cleaned up"), and an affable depiction of his penchant for outrageous rhetoric ("mad as hell and [he's] not going to take it anymore").

The rise of the genre, which paralleled the rise of the Ohio congressman, was not surprising. In a city known for its arid pomposity, Traficant stood out as an authentic oddball—a mixture of comic relief and refreshing recklessness, a rare truth teller who had enough "balls," as he liked to put it, to describe his colleagues as "prostitutes" and the president as "stoned." Though Traficant had long been linked to the mob, the press corps, which ordinarily pounced on the most picayune ethics violations, treated these allegations as part of the essential fabric of the Traficant myth. They didn't prompt high-minded denunciations; they simply added to the mystique.

Despite a nearly invisible legislative record, he was featured on "60 Minutes," "The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour," "This Week With David Brinkley," Fox News, CNBC, "Nightline," and two segments of "Donahue." "We're aware we use him a lot," CNN Capitol Hill producer John Roselli told *The Washington Monthly*, "but sometimes his quotes are so good you can't resist." Fellow Democrats were also quick to indulge Traficant, eager for his erratic vote in a tightly divided House. "There might be some who would look at him like a clown," Ohio Democratic Representative Douglas Applegate said, "but very few."

But this month, as Traficant stood in a Cleveland courtroom, for the second time facing charges of bribery and racketeering, his image as a harmless buffoon gave way to a less endearing one: He had allegedly been forcing his staff to turn over parts of their salaries, cheating on his taxes, and accepting gifts in exchange for political favors. More revealing still, his longtime top aide recently admitted that for years he had been a bagman for the mob. Members of Congress expressed shock and outrage, as they do whenever a member of their institution falls from grace. Yet the profile of Traficant that has emerged since his indictment should have been plain to see all these years—that no one did is what's shocking. For nearly two decades Traficant brought color to a bland city; and, to a profession often full of smiling phonies, he added authenticity—the rage of a genuinely angry man. And both qualities are so alien to the political culture of contemporary Washington that no one could tell where they ended and where corruption began.

Ironically, what made Traficant colorful and authentic in Washington made him indistinguishable in his hometown of Youngstown—a down-on-its-luck city where plenty of people wear unstylish clothes, curse, and rail against "elites." What made Traficant an exception in Youngstown was simple: He had long been linked to the underworld.

When Traficant came to Washington in 1985, he had already been indicted for willfully and knowingly "combin[ing], conspir[ing], confederat[ing] and agree[ing]"

ROB BARBONI



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with racketeers to commit crimes against the United States during his 1980 race for sheriff. Although he was eventually acquitted in an extraordinary trial in which he served as his own counsel, he left behind a mountain of evidence that implicated him in plainly unsavory dealings. Among other things, he could be heard on tape allegedly accepting thousands of dollars in bribes from a mobster named "Charlie the Crab"—a ruthless gangster who later disappeared, his empty car found along the side of the road.

During the trial there were even indications that he had tried to obstruct justice: One of his deputy sheriffs admitted under oath that Traficant had begged him to shoot him, wounding him superficially in order to make it look as if he'd been the target of a mob hit. (Traficant later acknowledged this, telling a reporter he should have had "somebody in my family shoot me" because they wouldn't have squealed.) And in a 1987 civil trial, in which Traficant pled the Fifth, he was found liable by a U.S. Tax Court for evading taxes on more than $100,000 in bribes he had taken from mobsters. Traficant "knew the funds he received from the organized crime factions were income to him, and he concealed his bribes ... with intent to evade taxes," the judge concluded.

But barely anyone in Congress or the press denounced or shunned him. Not even when he appointed as his top district aide a reputed bagman named Charles O'Nesti, a longtime mob associate whom, in his own sheriff race, Traficant had threatened to arrest. Last year, when I traveled to Youngstown to write about Traficant, I found in a Cleveland courthouse a box filled with the transcripts of the "Charlie the Crab" tapes. In them, Traficant apparently threatened to kill law enforcement officers who betrayed him and his new associates: "They'll fuckin' come up swimming in the Mahoning River," said the future congressman. And: "I am a loyal fucker and my loyalty is here and now.... That's why you financed me and I understand that."

"He is not a clown but a clever con man," Mark Shutes, a former anthropologist at Youngstown State University who has studied organized crime in the region, told me not long ago. "Everyone has always known that. Traficant has left this area economically destitute and in the hands of gangsters for almost twenty years. But how are people here, who have never known anything different, supposed to get rid of him when people in Washington continue to treat him like a star?"

WHEN I RETURNED to Washington, Traficant was involved in another celebrated shakedown—this one of his Democratic colleagues, whom he feared were finally distancing themselves from him. (See my article on Youngstown, "Crimetown USA," TNR, July 10, 2000.) On national television, he threatened, during an election year in which control of the House of Representatives hung in the balance, to cross party lines and to back a Republican speaker unless Democrats rose to his defense—and, for good measure, showered millions of dollars in pork on his district. Finally the Democrats said "enough" and refused.

But Traficant soon found a new band of enablers, the very people whose law-and-order campaign had nearly brought down a president: Republicans. Desperate to fortify their slender House majority, they rallied around Traficant, even though a grand jury was being impaneled against him, even though his former aide O'Nesti had already pled guilty to racketeering, and even though a U.S. Tax Court had already found the congressman liable for not paying taxes on bribes from organized crime. "There isn't a finer man, there isn't a finer member of Congress, there isn't a finer human being than Jim Traficant," Ohio Republican Representative Steve LaTourette, a former prosecutor, told the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*. GOP leaders backed up their words with deeds, funneling $20 million into his district, money that helped him win a ninth term. The right-wing press, which had crucified Bill Clinton, joined the new crusade. On Fox News, conservative pundit Sean Hannity gushed: "Congressman, my favorite Democrat, if you start a defense fund ... I'm donating."

And even after the congressman's indictment last week, the mainstream press continued to churn out variants of the Traficant profile. One example, on the front page of the *Washington Post* Style section on May 5, read:

> Among its other consequences, this event could potentially silence the House's unofficial King of the Surrealistic One-Minute Speech. Traficant, a nine-term congressman from Youngstown, is famous for his polyester clothing, his bad hairdo and the brief but bizarre speeches he makes on the House floor nearly every morning. Gesturing grandly, Traficant discourses on anything from China and the IRS (he hates both) to bras and beauty pageants, nearly always including his all-purpose cry of frustration and vexation: "Beam me up!"

ON ABC, SAM DONALDSON affectionately described the newly indicted congressman as "a colorful member of the House for years," while partner Cokie Roberts went even further, declaring: "[I]f the feds get him, we will miss him on the floor of the House of Representatives. He gets up almost daily, gives one-minute speeches on any subject whatsoever, and they are fun to listen to."

The legal system, of course, presumes Traficant innocent of the latest charges until proven guilty. But Congress and the media hardly need a legal verdict before they can issue a moral indictment—a point Republicans made repeatedly in reference to Clinton. More-than-credible allegations of severe wrongdoing have dogged Traficant even since before he was elected to Congress. A healthy political system and media would have ostracized him. But they didn't because, in a strange way, Washington needed James Traficant—and the illusion that it was still a place where people on the House floor stood up and said whatever they thought. In the new Washington, the one of pollsters and consultants and spokesmen, the hunger for authenticity has replaced the hunger for decency. And while it remains to be seen whether Traficant can escape legal punishment once again, the more important question—the one that nobody has the "balls" to ask—is whether his co-conspirators in Congress and the press will get off scot-free as well. ■



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# Adam Michnik and Leon Wieseltier: An Exchange

Dear Leon,

You are disappointed in me because, in my article in *The New York Times* ("Poles and the Jews: How Deep the Guilt?," March 17), I was weighing words carefully when "a howl would have done quite well." I think that in Polish-Jewish relations there have already been enough howls of pain. I have heard plenty of them from Polish anti-Semites; and the Jewish cry that "the Poles sucked anti-Semitism with their mother's milk" is indelibly imprinted in my memory. This is why I prefer balanced judgment and a willingness to understand one's adversary. The problem for the Poles and the problem for the Jews are similar: Each of these two groups thinks of itself as the innocent victim. This is a stereotype of two peoples who, as Isaac Bashevis Singer put it, have lived alongside each other but not *with* each other.

The book by Jan Gross describing the murder of Jews in Jedwabne caused moral shock among Poles and a huge public debate that is still going on. It was a murder inspired by Nazi encouragement and acquiescence but committed by Poles. No sensible person in Poland tries to justify this horrible crime. On the contrary: brought face to face with it, Poles now feel a sense of lost innocence.

In my article I described this Polish shock and the temperature of the Polish debate. I knew that I was touching the dark side of the Polish collective memory, but I believed that this is how a Polish writer should react in the face of an exposed crime of this kind. When I picked up a copy of The New Republic, I assumed that you would react in a similar way, with a contemplation on the darker aspects of Jewish memory. However, Leon, in your reply ("Righteous," April 9 & 16), you chose to use several remarks about the "moral exquisiteness" you perceived in my text. I shall disregard this dimension of our controversy, except to recall Spinoza's opinion that "when Jan speaks about Paul, it reflects on Jan and not on Paul."

I wrote that there is no Polish family that was not wounded by the war. You call it "the usual Polish apologetics." But the truth is, Leon, that is a simple Polish fact. And although such facts should not be used to relativize the crime in Jedwabne, to know them is a prerequisite to understanding Polish-Jewish relations. For many years after the war Poles grieved over their murdered compatriots without acknowledging that the fate of their Jewish neighbors was incomparably more tragic—an utterly exceptional tragedy in the history of humanity.

On the other hand, there has prevailed among Jews—as Rabbi Klenicki put it—a triumphalism of pain, as though Jews decided that only the Jewish tragedy was worthy of preservation in the consciousness. And this is the context of our own polemic here. Polish authors today are trying to transcend the stereotype of Polish innocence and are grappling with the legacy of anti-Semitism. This is difficult and painful. But to read recent Polish articles on the issue is to be deeply moved. The Poles are truly breaking away from the Polish stereotype. I am sorry, Leon, that you have written as though you are still in the comfortable grip of Jewish stereotypes, like someone with neither the will nor the courage to enter into a difficult dialogue with the Poles. Such a dialogue requires a revision of stereotypes. You have to assume that there may be certain aspects of the Polish-Jewish reality that you do not know, and that perhaps, therefore, you may not be able to fully understand.

Poles also have a right to the memory of their own pain. And they have a right to expect that Jews will be aware of it as well. Try to transcend the Jewish stereotype and look at the wartime reality with a Polish eye. I think that every Pole has an obligation to look with a Jewish eye in order to understand the suffering of the Jews. And you should also try to see in your Polish interlocutor a friend who is grappling with a difficult history, not an anti-Semite and prevaricator who wants "to leave no guilt uncomplicated."

The Poles are neither genetically tainted anti-Semites nor trying to avoid looking truth in the eye—even the most difficult truth. But that does not mean succumbing to false generalizations. Were the Poles both victims and victimizers at the same time? I am afraid of such generalizations. Which Poles? Those who were killed in the struggles against the Nazis? Or perhaps those who saved Jews, among them your mother? Do you make those Poles responsible for the crime in Jedwabne? Do you make them responsible for the blackmailers, known in Polish as *szmalcownicy*? Or perhaps it is precisely the *szmalcownik*, and not the hero of the anti-Nazi underground, whom you take as a symbol of the Polish response to the German occupation. Such a judgment, which I would not dare to ascribe to you, could only be the result of ignorance or dishonesty. I see symbols in the heroes of the Ghetto Uprising and not in the Jewish policemen who served the occupiers and were clearly both victims and victimizers.

You write, Leon, that there were many more murderous Poles than there were righteous ones. How did you make your count? Yes, there were Poles during the occupation who committed crimes against Jews. But those crimes were condemned by the Polish government-in-exile in London and were punished by the Polish underground. I will go further and say that, among members of the Polish resistance, there were also many people shaped by anti-Semitic stereotypes; but the overwhelming majority of Poles on the anti-Semitic right—unlike their counterparts in France, for example—took part in the anti-Nazi resistance, and some of those people saved Jews. Among them was Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, author of the moving appeal to save Jews that I quoted in the *Times*.

The appeal issued by Kossak-Szczucka—no doubt anti-Semitic in its qualifying remarks yet heroic in its plea—counters the Jewish stereotype according to which anti-Semitism equals extermination. This is why, Leon, you did not find anything in Kossak-Szczucka except anti-Semitic poison. I, on the other hand, found in her appeal



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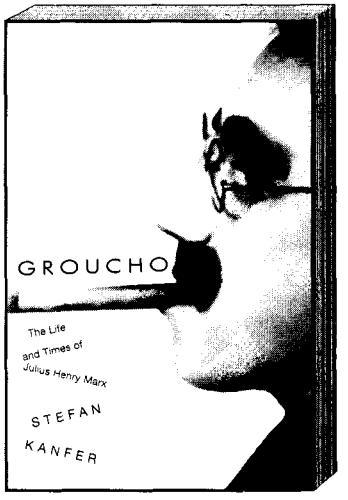


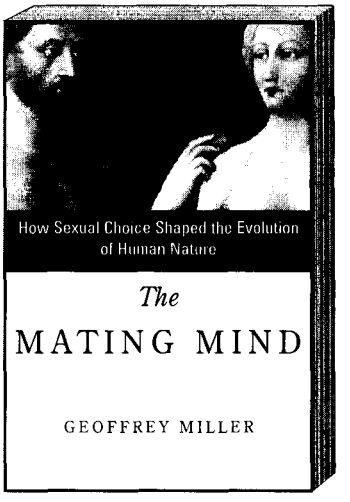


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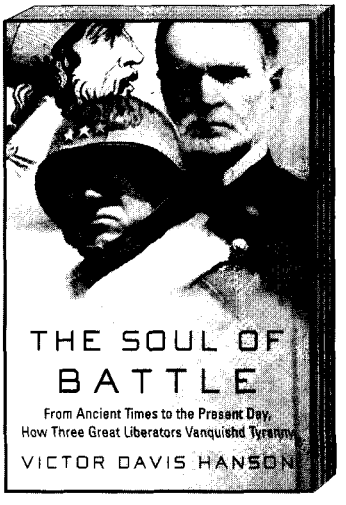
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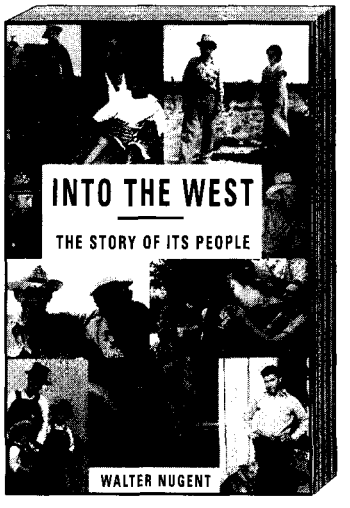


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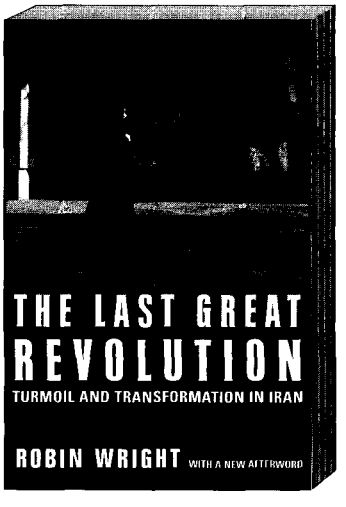


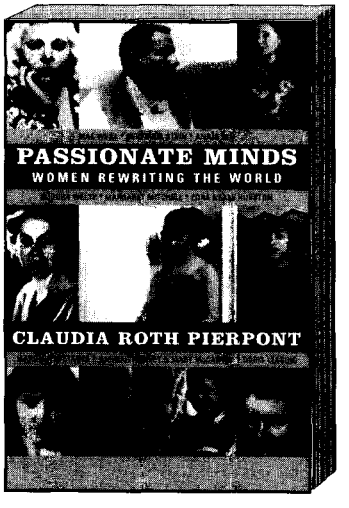


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the evidence of a heroism of the highest order. For years, day after day, this Catholic writer and prisoner of Auschwitz risked her life saving Jews—people whom she neither knew nor particularly liked—in a situation where public executions and fear for the safety of one's immediate family paralyzed almost everybody. Such an attitude deserves not contempt but respect. And respect is the basic elementary condition for an honest Polish-Jewish conversation about truth and reconciliation. I would like to be of service to such a conversation, helping to break both Polish and Jewish stereotypes. I feel I have a responsibility to do this.

However, I do not believe in any collective responsibility except a moral one. What I mean is that I can blame myself for the acts of others, but I would not give anyone else the right to blame me for those same acts. This is why I feel guilty neither for the crimes of the murderers of Jedwabne nor for the crimes of Communists of Jewish lineage (although for the latter I feel somewhat more responsible, but for purely personal reasons). My sense of moral responsibility has made me very reluctant to impose collective guilt onto any other community whatsoever. You wrote, Leon: "Individuals belong to groups, and it is a cost or a benefit of their belonging that they are morally implicated by their groups, which are moral agents, too.... I am not hurt when I am interrogated about the misdeeds of Jews or the misdeeds of Americans, because I have chosen to be known as a Jew and as an American.... I could not permit myself to feel pride about the accomplishments of my people and my country if I did not require myself to feel shame about the perfidies of my people and my country...." And then you add, "I do not believe that Michnik would disagree with what I have just written."

Of course I agree with you, but this agreement does not get us anywhere. Of course I feel pain and shame for the murder in Jedwabne and for other Polish crimes. But for these crimes committed by specific murderers, I will never agree that I, my Polish friends, and the Polish nation should be accused collectively. I understand, Leon, that, as an American, you have a right to be proud of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln and a right to feel ashamed of slavery, the extermination of Native Americans, racial segregation, and the betrayal of Poland at the Yalta conference. As a Jew, you have a right to be proud of Moses, Spinoza, and Einstein and a right to be ashamed of the Bolshevik murderers with Jewish names, the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila, and the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. You have a right to be ashamed, but I do not have the right to blame you for these crimes. But, frankly speaking, I do not really know what comes out of this pride or this shame. After all, that kind of understanding leads to utterly absurd questions. Is it because of Lincoln and Spinoza that you feel better than I, having up my sleeve only Copernicus, Mickiewicz, and Chopin? Do you feel any less morally burdened because of the lynchings by Ku Klux Klan bandits than the average Pole because of Jedwabne? Do you feel the need to apologize to Poles for Yalta? Or to Christians for crucifying Jesus?

Let's be serious. Both you and I are responsible for ourselves, for our deeds, for those close to us with whom we identify ourselves. So I eagerly accept responsibility for your sins, because I have chosen you as my friend. But I do not feel any identification with the murderers in Jedwabne, just as you do not feel any bond with the Jewish *szmalcownicy* from the Gestapo who denounced my relatives. Those are the reasons why I am writing "carefully" and "weighing words." Poland is saying the Kaddish over the graves of the murdered. And the Kaddish is said with solemn dignity, and not with howling.

Yours, with warm regards,
ADAM
*Translated by Elzbieta Matynia*

DEAR ADAM,
When you were confronted with Jan Gross's revelations about the horror at Jedwabne, you were perfectly correct to explore "the dark side of the Polish collective memory"; correct and also intrepid, in the inflamed context of the debate in Poland. But why did you assume that I "would react in a similar way, with a contemplation on the darker aspects of Jewish memory"? The Jews at Jedwabne in the summer of 1941 did nothing but die. I do not accept that the events at Jedwabne deserve to provoke any special Jewish self-examination. This, I assure you, is not because Jews have nothing in the world with which to reproach themselves. It is not solidarity with my brethren that prevents me from agreeing with you. Quite the contrary. I believe that solidarity is sometimes an impediment to an honest life and a decent life. No, I insist upon the one-sidedness of this reckoning because of my general understanding of prejudice and oppression. If you wish to understand anti-Semitism, do not study Jews. Study non-Jews, because the fantasies and the atrocities are theirs. If you wish to understand racism, do not study blacks. Study whites, for the same reason. The notion that in some significant sense there are two sides to such questions, that prejudice has a basis in reality and oppression has a cause in the behavior of the oppressed, is itself a concession to the injustice that we both despise.

Who is against dialogue? But dialogue is a shibboleth of this sensitive age. So let us think a little more strenuously about dialogue. It is not the only form of moral discussion; it is not even the only form of respectful discussion. For dialogue makes the assumption of a perfect symmetry between the individuals who take part in it. Its ethical beauty is owed to the equality that it posits between the interlocutors. But often this equality between individuals is mistakenly promoted into an equivalence between their views. The premise of the summons to dialogue is that there is truth in what you say and there is truth in what I



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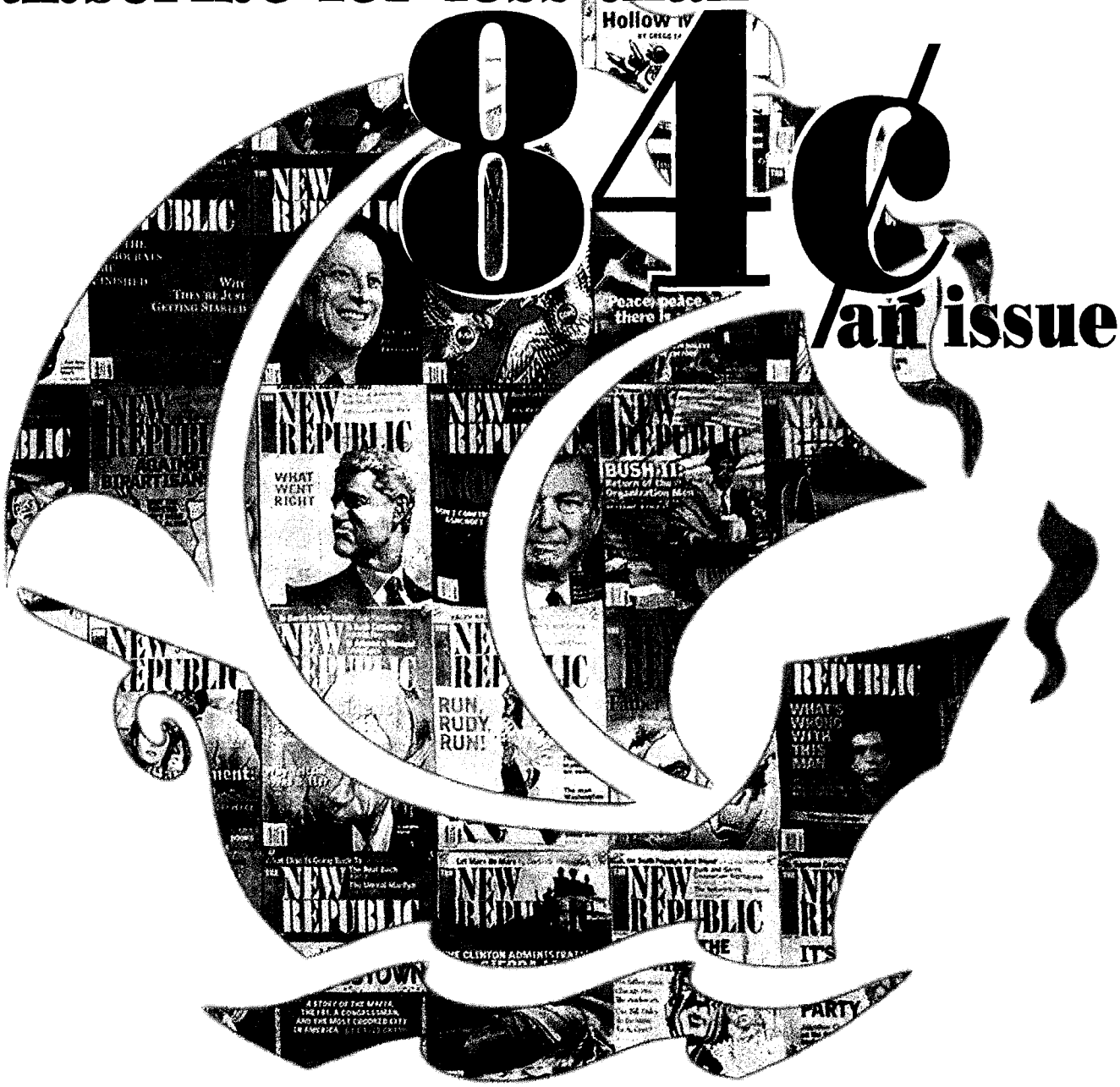


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# Adam Michnik and Leon Wieseltier: An Exchange

say. This is frequently the case. But what if you are completely right and I am completely wrong? Surely this is possible. Then our "dialogue" must consist of my admission of error, which of course is not an impairment of my dignity. In a discussion between Poles and Jews about Jedwabne, I do not see that there is a dialogical symmetry between the interlocutors. One has suffered at the hands of the other. This absence of symmetry does not mean that one is superior to the other: there is no moral superiority in suffering. It means only that history is asymmetrical. This asymmetry is an empirical matter. It is also a matter of common experience: there are many disparities of power in ordinary life. As a result of those disparities, we injure each other in many ways, and these injuries cannot be comprehended or absolved by fictions of parity. In such situations we must certainly have a conversation, but I am not sure that we must have a dialogue. If ever I do anything to harm you, you will have a right to expect more from me than dialogue. (I am speaking generally: *you* do not owe *me* an apology for Jedwabne.)

You call, quite reasonably, for "a willingness to understand one's adversary." This you take to be an essential element of dialogue. Are you saying that the Jews in Poland were Poland's adversary? Your notion of dialogical equivalence would seem to require you to be saying this; but I do not see how you can mean it. I am certain, in fact, that you do not mean it. For it sounds terribly like the statement about the Jews by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka ("We still consider them the political, economic, and ideological enemies of Poland") that you cited in your original article with disapproval. Recently I have learned more about her heroism, and also more about her worldview. You are right: good and evil can live together in the same soul. Yet I am still reluctant to accept your view of her contradictions as an adequate basis for Polish-Jewish reconciliation. Respect for the other is infirm and untrustworthy if it is forever an act of self-overcoming. Must we really settle for so little? If you believe that anti-Semitism is an ineradicable feature of Polish life, then you should say so. But I have never known you to be a pessimist in affairs of conscience.

When you write that as a consequence of Gross's book "Poles now feel a sense of lost innocence," I am startled. What nation ever had innocence to lose? I find it hard to dignify the disillusion that you describe, because this would obscure or even obliterate the precious distinction between history and memory. Memory nourishes not least because it lies, and collective memory lies most gorgeously of all. But memory is not our only source of knowledge about the past, or our most reliable source. Surely it is the task of the intellectual to rectify memory with history. Historically speaking, there were times when Poles were victims and there were times when Poles were victimizers. (The same is true of Jews, though the times when Jews were victims, when they lacked power to use or to abuse, were desperately long, and included the centuries of the Jewish sojourn in Poland.) And there were times when Poles were both victims and victimizers. But none of this has anything to do with "innocence," which is not so much a collective memory as a collective deception. I see why the generalizations of identity make you uncomfortable. They trip me up, too. They must be made concrete, as you insist. But I do not see how anybody except cosmopolitans can do without them, and even cosmopolitans generalize about themselves. More importantly, these generalizations represent a recognition of the moral agency of groups, which is the subject of our disputation. (The consoling fact is that we fall, all of us, under many generalizations. I am not your friend, I am your friends.)

If I am still in the "grip of Jewish stereotypes," I assure you that the grip is not "comfortable": in my existence as a Jew I have been for a long time alive to the danger that collective memory poses to intellectual probity. We are certainly morbid. But "a triumphalism of pain"? That, too, is a stereotype about the Jews, Rabbi Klenicki or no Rabbi Klenicki. It is these days the "advanced" stereotype, the preferred stereotype of certain critics of contemporary Jewish culture. I used to entertain it myself. For the salience of the Holocaust in Jewish identity is plain, and it is unfortunate. Yet it is also understandable: how could a catastrophe of such magnitude not overwhelm a community, not stupefy it, not break its heart, not embitter its expectations of life, not fix it for at least a generation in grief and anger and fear? I, too, deplore that Jewish culture has become increasingly a culture of commemoration—but I, too, have what to commemorate. (Remember, I am a son of Drohobycz and Stryj.) I will tell you this: I have never met a Jew who "decided that only the Jewish tragedy is worthy of preservation in the general consciousness." The suggestion is unworthy of you. (When you were struggling to bring the tragedy of communism to an end, did you have difficulty in finding Jewish allies?) In the aftermath of the almost complete annihilation of European Jewry, it is not the specter of triumphalism that Jews have to banish from their midst, it is the specter of defeatism. They must devise a way to honor what they know about the world without being undone by what they know about the world. Should they forget what they know about the world, so as to be acquitted of a "triumphalism of pain"?

There is no sense in which I consider myself "better" than you. Also, I never, not for a moment, regarded you as "an anti-Semite." Also, I was not sarcastic when I imputed moral exquisiteness to you: there are worse vices, and in other circumstances you have made it a virtue. Also, the Jews did not crucify Jesus. As for you accepting responsibility for my sins: I warn you, my friend, it is a terrible responsibility for you to bear.

Yours affectionately,
Leon ■



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## How the oilmen in the White House see the world.

# The Producers

*By* GREGG EASTERBROOK

OPPONENTS OF THE Bush energy plan like to accuse its authors of thinking like oilmen. They're right. President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney both worked in the petroleum industry, and its worldview permeates the energy policy they unveiled last week. Where the critics are wrong is in the unstated assumption that thinking like oilmen is an unequivocally bad thing—that all energy companies want to do is profiteer and kill caribou. On important questions of policy, the energy-industry worldview is often correct. And where the energy worldview—and the Bush plan—are wrong, it is often because they fail to face the implications of their own thinking.

To oilmen and oilwomen—as well as their counterparts in the gas, coal, atomic, and hydro industries—modern American history is about the control of energy. The United States began its rise to national greatness in the late nineteenth century, not long after the first oil well was drilled in Titusville, Pennsylvania. In the early twentieth century, the country leaped ahead of Britain, Germany, and Japan as the world's leading power by being the first to exploit petroleum on a colossal scale; it fought across the entire globe and won a world war for democratic survival partly through mastery of oil. With peace assured, cheap energy paved the way for dramatic improvement in the average American's quality of life. Today the United States brings high living standards to more than 200 million people, a historically unprecedented feat, and it does so in large measure because energy is cheap and plentiful.

But only energy types themselves, the oil worldview continues, can face this fundamental truth. Others want to wring their hands about the distasteful necessities of energy production—while demanding cheap gasoline and home heat, of course. Rather than be reviled, oilmen and oilwomen should be heroes. It is they who are out in the field struggling with dangerous rigs, or sweltering in the rain forest while dodging arrows, or heaving on austere oil platforms far out at sea: whatever it takes to keep the pump primed.

Yes, procuring energy is sometimes disagreeable. It has been since at least 1921, when Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover privately asked Standard Oil of New Jersey to ingratiate itself with Arabian culture and turn the oil sheiks away from the Brits and Germans toward the red, white, and blue. The result was Aramco, the Arab-American oil behemoth that made America the only Western country where everyone could own a car—you didn't have to be rich, as you did in Europe. Today's oilmen and oilwomen continue this tradition: While others fret, they look dictators in the eye and make the deals that are needed to ensure that the tankers sail.

In the energy-industry worldview, the story of natural gas is just as noble. In the 1970s government experts declared the fuel on the verge of exhaustion. Had the flow of gas stopped, a second Depression might have begun. Gas men and gas women answered the call, finding vast amounts and selling it for barely more than transportation costs. And what of gas and oil's cousin, coal? Everybody grumbles about mining damage and greenhouse gases, but no one hesitates to flip the light switches that coal powers. Though coal demand has approached record levels, coal men and coal women keep driving down the price so the average person can afford to sit comfortably in air conditioning.

Americans, the energy industry believes, have grown spoiled, taking their energy-based, high standard of living for granted while complaining endlessly about prices that, objectively, are very reasonable. Natural gas, heating oil, bulk coal, and residential electricity cost less in the United States than in almost every other country. With all the public moaning, you'd never guess that, adjusted for inflation, electricity per kilowatt-hour costs an average of 20 percent less today than it did 20 years ago. Gasoline sells in the United States for less than half the prevailing $4 per gallon price in other developed nations; and, even with recent pump-price increases, it remains cheap in real-dollar terms. "If you strip away the part of the pump price that's taxes and the part that is the world price of the barrel of oil, oil companies are selling today's much-improved gasoline for slightly less than they sold gas for in the 1950s," says Dennis O'Brien, former chief economist for the oil consortium Caltex. And the product itself is significantly better. Most pollutants are now chemically removed from gasoline (a principal reason why smog is declining, even in Los Angeles and Houston), and more than a dozen basic blends are now produced to provide optimal engine performance in different conditions around the country.

Yet while the computer industry is endlessly praised for innovating and holding down costs, no one praises the oil industry for the hard work and brainpower that has produced better, low-cost gasoline. For keeping children's bedrooms warm and keeping their milk cold, energy companies are slammed instead of thanked. That a member of the U.S. Senate (Barbara Boxer, last week, speaking about Cheney) can use "sounds like an oilman" as an insult drives oilmen to distraction. Americans, the oilmen and oilwomen grumble,



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expect unlimited cheap gasoline but whine about how oil rigs spoil coastal views. And Americans have become naïve—a word Cheney uses often to describe his critics. You can't have a never-ending supply of cheap energy without disturbing the environment and making some unsavory foreign entanglements. You may not like us, oilmen and oilwomen think, but if we disappeared, you'd beg us to come back.

This is how oilmen like Bush and Cheney see the world, and their view is not without merit. They are right that energy policy requires hard choices that most Americans don't want to make. And some of those hard choices are reflected in the president's energy plan—just not enough of them.

IT IS TO wake the public from its energy daydream that the new administration has declared a crisis. "We are now in an energy crisis," Bush said early in his presidency. In his first policy speech, "A National Report on America's Energy Crisis," new Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham used the word "crisis" eleven times. "[W]hat the people need to hear loud and clear is that we're running out of energy in America," Bush said from the White House last month. Once it was leftists and environmentalists who cried energy crisis; after the recovery from the 1970s oil crunch, some even seemed heartbroken that petroleum did not vanish, taking capitalist society down with it. Now Republicans and the energy industry have expropriated the phrase, betting that only an emergency can overcome the public's ingrained complacency.

Yet where exactly is the crisis? No form of primary energy stock is in short supply, nationally or globally, which is why prices are generally low. The international coal market is glutted. Twice in 2001, OPEC has cut production in response to a mild global surplus of crude. Yes, pump prices have been rising lately, but this results mainly from the fact that refinery capacity has been straining to keep up with the SUV craze, not from lack of oil to refine. California's rolling blackouts are the products of a spectacularly wrongheaded deregulation scheme, not an underlying shortage. Though some analysts foresee a global oil-production peak in about a decade (see "Opportunity Cost," May 15, 2000), there's no sign of that peak yet in production statistics, and other experts believe the world holds at least another century's worth of oil at affordable prices. The United States has several centuries' worth of coal reserves, thousands of years of uranium, at least several decades of gas, and probably much more. Renewable and alternatives fuels are improving, while their costs continue to decline. If this is a "crisis," grade inflation has come to the concept of national emergency.

To underscore the urgency, Bush has repeatedly accused Bill Clinton of "years of neglect" of energy policy, saying, "For too long we have had no energy policy." And it's true that Clinton spent little time on energy issues. But that's because he left energy supply to the market, something Republicans usually recommend. Bush's energy plan, by contrast, represents a substantial market intervention—a reason Jerry Taylor, director of natural resource studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, opposes it. Bush's plan brims with new Washington authority, including the power to force local governments to accept power lines on their land, as well as cumbersome new rules, including an "energy impact statement" federal agencies must file—the latter after years of complaints by conservatives that environmental-impact statements create costly red tape.

The last president to intervene so aggressively in the energy market was Jimmy Carter, and, as Pietro Nivola of the Brookings Institution has observed, almost every central assumption of Carter's policy turned out to be wrong. (Some assumptions, such as an irreversible decline in the supply of natural gas, were wrong even before the Carter policy was unveiled.) It's possible that central assumptions of the Bush energy plan—especially the need for federal intervention to inspire more production—will also turn out to be wrong because the market will fix its own problems. Tellingly, the Bush energy plan comes as companies are already acting to increase supply in response to price signals.

For instance, the White House proposal anticipates that the United States will need 1,300 to 1,900 new power plants over the next 20 years, a construction pace of up to one per week. Cheney dwells on this figure to accentuate the gravity of the situation. But Cheney's numbers sound hauntingly like a 1973 study released by Richard Nixon, which projected widespread national electricity shortages unless 1,000 new atomic power plants were built over 25 years. Only a handful were completed, and electricity supply was fine—at least until some California government officials with a sense of humor got an idea for a new regulatory system. Cheney's high estimate is derived essentially by projecting current power-use trend lines as if none will ever change. But if we've learned one thing about energy, it's that "irreversible" trends change quickly. Unpredictable combinations of market action, consumer decisions, and world trends are almost certain to overturn Cheney's assumptions that America needs 1,900 new power plants; the assumption may not even last the year.

BUT, THOUGH IT'S possible that market forces would compensate for energy problems on their own, Bush and Cheney are correct to say that the country needs increased energy production, including a new, rational look at atomic power. More domestic oil drilling and gas drilling is needed to meet higher demand and to replace existing fields that are being depleted. Even assuming better efficiency, U.S. oil demand may rise by one-third by 2020, according to the Energy Information Administration. Demand for natural gas is expected to rise as much as two-thirds in the same period.

To produce this new energy, America needs more infrastructure. No large petroleum refineries have been built in the United States in 20 years. When Clinton released some oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in 2000, it had to be shipped overseas to be refined. Many parts of the country need to invest in power lines. During some recent Northern California blackouts, spare power was available in the southern part of the state but could not be zapped north because of a shortage of grid capacity. Because of "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) lawsuits and junk-science alarmism about magnetic fields (the fields around transmission lines are



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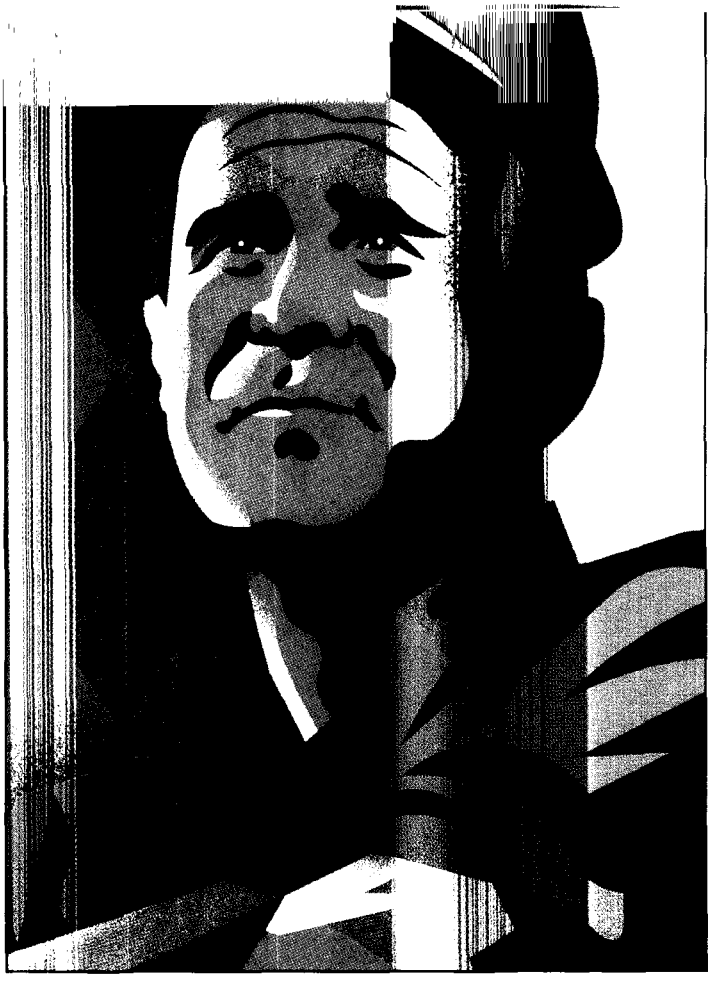

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weaker than what everyone is continuously exposed to from Earth's magnetic field anyway), construction of new power lines has become almost impossible in much of the country. The country also needs more natural-gas pipeline capacity, something opposed by NIMBYs and junk-science hysterics. Infuriatingly, as natural-gas supplies grew tight on the West Coast last fall, years' worth of gas sat unused in wells at North Slope fields around Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, because there was no conduit to carry it to the lower 48 states.

Bush is right, too, that the United States needs more domestic energy production to guarantee national security. Have we forgotten the Gulf war? Domestic petroleum production has fallen from 7.4 million barrels per day in 1990 to 5.9 million today, while imports have risen from 36 percent of consumption, during the OPEC embargo in 1974, to 56 percent today; and that figure is expected to reach 60 percent by around 2010. I recently attended a Brookings Institution conference where a policy wonk asked, "With everything going so well for America, what kind of problem could come out of nowhere and cause us big trouble, especially military trouble?" I happened to be sitting near four Brookings Armed Forces fellows—mid-career officers, one from each service—when this question was asked. All four immediately mouthed: "Oil."

BUSH AND CHENEY are also right to say that the time has come to reassess atomic power, mainly by making it easier to win a license to open a new reactor power station. In the United States, atomic energy has never caused any public injury (numerous public health studies showed no harm at Three Mile Island). Fossil-fuel use, by contrast, annually contributes to thousands of premature deaths, mainly from respiratory disease. Atomic power produces no air pollutants (and hence no respiratory disease) and no greenhouse gases. Its raw material is, for all intents and purposes, inexhaustible. New reactor designs are simplified and "inherently safe"—that is, their chain reactions are self-extinguishing if safety systems fail.

Reactor waste is a vexing issue politically but not technically. Such waste is dangerous only if you throw your arms around it; there is no wide-area effect, as there is from the fallout of a nuclear bomb. A person half a mile from unshielded "high level" reactor waste, the worst kind, would be exposed to less radiation than the natural "background radiation" that already falls on us from space; and reactor waste is *never* unshielded. Alarmists claim it would be horribly dangerous to bury heavily shielded reactor waste deep underground at the proposed Yucca Mountain facility in Nevada, whose design was reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences. But fear of such controlled disposal, far from living things, constitutes scientific illiteracy. Yes, atomic power plants are expensive, especially compared to making existing energy uses more efficient. But cost is the only substantive argument against atomic power.

BUSH AND CHENEY may even be right about opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to exploration. A quarter-century of oil production in nearby North Slope fields has caused nothing like the large-scale environmental calamity opponents now predict for ANWR drilling. A 2000 report by the Trustees for Alaska, a public-interest group that opposes oil exploration in Alaska, found numerous secondary problems on the North Slope—mostly spills of diesel fuel and process chemicals—but no systemic harm. In recent decades, caribou herds on the North Slope have expanded, for example. And ANWR exploration would use environmentally advanced equipment. Drill rigs now take up a much smaller "footprint" than they did when the Prudhoe Bay project was started in the early '70s, and oil companies have learned to forsake concrete for ice roads that simply melt away when the project ends.

Credible estimates from the U.S. Geological Survey and others suggest that beneath ANWR may lie enough petroleum to meet U.S. demand for a period lasting between six months and several years. Opponents use the six-month figure to suggest that oil production from ANWR would be pointless, since the refuge could not single-handedly satisfy U.S. needs. But this is like saying that since no one farm can possibly feed the nation, no farmer should plant a field. Many sources are needed to produce the 19 million oil barrels per day the United States currently slurps. If optimistic estimates prove correct, ANWR could provide approximately the portion of oil that the United States would import from Saudi Arabia in the next 20 years.

Bush and Cheney are also right to propose opening other



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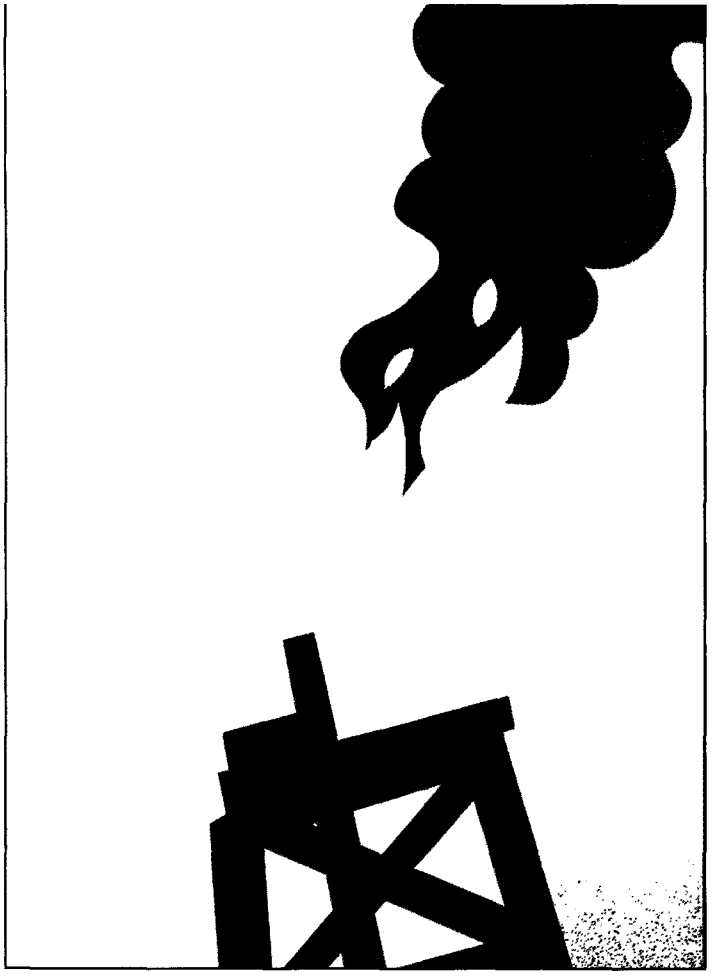
wilderness and coastal areas to drilling—especially gas drilling, which causes much less disturbance than drilling for oil. The public intensely dislikes offshore drilling, but its environmental effects have proved minimal, and offshore strikes have been the best energy news of the last 20 years, preventing widely predicted oil and gas depletion. Indeed, most of the potential production gains from the Bush plan come from opening wilderness and coastal areas to drilling. Americans may not like this new exploration, but they can't demand cheap fuel and then be squeamish about where it comes from. Maybe seeing drill rigs in national parks would make buyers face the truth about their SUVs.



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NOT ALL OF Bush's initiatives for increasing energy supply make sense, and some look like favors for the politically connected. One is a loose proposal for a government-sponsored initiative to manufacture alternative fuels from agricultural products. The plants would presumably be genetically engineered grasses or dwarf trees—as opposed to corn, which is currently employed to make ethanol. (Because corn requires expensive "inputs" of fertilizer and pesticides, it will probably always be impossible to make cheap corn-based fuel.) Most analysts consider alternative fuels a highly promising idea. Yet the administration's plan for public support of alternative fuels should raise red flags, especially among conservatives. How could Republicans forget Carter's Synthetic Fuels Corporation, a public-private partnership that turned into an expensive fiasco? (The project spent hundreds of millions of dollars on a pilot plant that produced only a trickle of output.) Alternative fuels will catch on when they are cheap enough to attract buyers. For-profit investment, not a government-sponsored effort, stands the best chance of bringing alternative fuels to market. Similarly, the lesson of years of failed federal efforts to spur wind and solar power—now slowly building market share, but only because government has stepped out of these technologies and entrepreneurs have taken over—is that alternative energies develop faster when the market is left alone.

Greenhouse concerns also receive no notice from Bush. Because of the link between fossil fuels and greenhouse buildup, climate policy and energy policy are one and the same. Yet the administration is pushing its energy-production agenda right away, while global-warming questions are put on hold. It may be that the president was only doing the inevitable when he pulled the plug on the Kyoto greenhouse deal, given that not even Clinton was willing to submit the agreement to the Senate. But since Bush says he takes global warming "seriously," it is incumbent upon him to propose a sensible alternative. Perhaps Bush has no intention of formulating a climate policy; but if he does, the first step would be to toss out the energy policy he's just finished.

THE BIGGEST problems with the White House plan don't involve the oilman's tendency to focus on supply; they involve his predisposition to ignore the need to manage demand via efficiency. It's true that conservation's true believers tend to oversell their idea. A group of five national laboratories won considerable publicity last month with a study projecting that future electricity-demand increases could almost be eliminated through energy efficiency. But projections like this have a tendency to be too rosy because of factors such as up-front cost. For example, factories can cut power use by replacing old single-speed process motors with the much more efficient variable-speed models available today. But the changeover may require stopping production for weeks while factory walls are torn out and then rebuilt. Thus the factory manager is not necessarily crazy for sticking with older, energy-inefficient machines. Critics blasted the White House for softening a last-minute Clinton order that all new central air conditioners be 30 percent more energy-efficient than current models; Bush reduced the requirement to a 20 percent improvement. Yet the 30 percent rule might have added hundreds of dollars to the cost of ACs, prompting people to refuse to buy the new models and to keep their old juice hogs running.

Studies by Margaret Fels, an energy researcher at Princeton University, have found that actual savings from energy-conservation efforts are often about half of what is expected. But halfway success with conservation could have a magnificent effect on national energy trends, maintaining Americans' lifestyles while reducing the pressure for ever more supply. Consider that energy consumption per dollar of GDP declined in the United States from about 1975 to about



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1995 (roughly when the SUV craze started), even as living standards steadily rose. Why? For one thing, today's typical new home uses less energy per square foot than the 1970 home did. Though today's home is stuffed with energy-draining devices, today's refrigerators, for example, require only about 40 percent as much power as those of a generation ago, even as they spit out crushed ice. Because everything is more efficient, that new home can be larger and more comfortable without requiring additional power. The best reason we should support energy efficiency is not virtuous sacrifice; it's that conservation will allow us to continue having all the stuff we like.

But the Bush plan makes only gestures toward energy efficiency. The plan, for instance, urges utilities to purchase power from renewable sources—yet federal law has already been encouraging this for 20 years. It also offers a tax credit to individuals who buy "hybrid" cars, which use combined piston-electric engines to improve gas mileage. Originally proposed by Al Gore, the idea was to confer the credit only on buyers of high-mileage hybrids, such as the 61 miles-per-gallon (mpg) Honda Insight. When Gore proposed the idea last year, free marketeers criticized it, arguing that since fuel efficiency brings its own economic reward, it wasn't something that the government needed to subsidize. Now events have rendered Bush's version of the idea even more suspect. The Detroit Big Three are working on SUVs that use partial hybrid features to obtain mild fuel-economy gains, raising mpg but still leaving it far short of automobile standards. Mild improvement is better than nothing, but automakers will demand that these behemoths qualify for the hybrid tax credit—and then SUV purchases will be subsidized by taxpayers.

THE WORST THING about the Bush plan is its silence on the primary energy-efficiency question of the moment: the need for higher gasoline mileage across the board—not in a few hybrids but in the cars, SUVs, and light trucks everyone drives.

Oil gluttony by typical commuters is America's biggest energy challenge. Fuel economy in new American vehicles started improving in 1975, after the first oil shock, and kept improving until it reached a peak of 26 mpg for vehicles in 1988. Rising mpg figures softened oil demand, held down gasoline prices, and proved a leading factor in breaking the monopoly power of OPEC. But since suburban-assault-vehicle madness has taken hold, mileage has nosed downward; this year the mpg of new vehicles fell to the lowest level since 1980. This has happened for two reasons. First, SUVs and light trucks are held to a lower mileage standard than cars—absurdly, government rules reward SUVs for being huge and wasteful. Second, federal mileage standards have not been strengthened since 1990, and, during Clinton's two terms as president, he took no action to alter that. If American energy policy has suffered "years of neglect," vehicle mpg is what has been neglected most, and the Bush plan continues this approach.

The tool government once used to enforce better gas mileage, a complicated fleet-average standard called CAFE, has a bad reputation among economists. But, instead of offering a better system, Bush proposes inaction. "Senior administration officials" told reporters at the White House energy-policy briefing that Bush cannot do anything about mpg until he receives a National Academy of Sciences study on vehicle fuel economy that is scheduled to be released in July. Yet the National Research Council, a division of the National Academy of Sciences, has already produced studies saying mpg can be significantly increased without sacrificing auto size or comfort. This could be done with current technology because, contrary to popular belief, automakers have not stopped trying to improve engine and drivetrain efficiency. They have improved it steadily—the problem is that the gains have gone into power rather than mpg. Today's new vehicles have, on average, about one-third more horsepower and accelerate notably faster than vehicles did 25 years ago. If some horsepower gains were traded for fuel efficiency, we could still ride in vehicles larger and faster than those our parents owned, without racing through the world's oil supply. Bush is correct to tell the left it needs to face the music on energy production, but he can't credibly do that while allowing the right to wear earplugs on conservation.

THEREIN LIES ENERGY POLICY'S underlying conundrum: Polls show that Americans oppose ANWR drilling and offshore oil exploration, demand cheap gasoline, and want the right to buy unregulated SUVs. Something's got to give—society cannot sustain all those things at once. Americans want central ACs and wide-screen TVs but fume about the utility bill; they want the thermostat set high in the winter but are shocked if heating costs go up. There is nothing wrong with living an energy-intensive life. But you can't have ever-higher energy use without paying for it, especially if you want to prohibit companies from prospecting for fossil fuels in the wilderness and in the seas.

This underlying conundrum will not change until some national leader takes up the task of educating the public about the hard choices in energy policy. Voters must understand that either mpg and energy efficiency rise or prices do—those are the options. No politician is eager to carry such a message. But Bush often says the difference between him and the poll-obsessed Clinton is that he is willing to lead. Why not lead on hard energy choices? Instead his administration proposes indulging the public by making it seem as if we can simultaneously have cheap gasoline and unregulated SUVs forever.

Cheap gasoline and big cars forever—this dream is at the heart of the oil worldview, in which the willingness of oilmen and oilwomen to face hard choices is what makes the dream possible. But the White House plan shows that there are hard choices that oilmen such as Bush and Cheney would rather not face, especially the choice about whether to get smarter about energy use or to pay more. For decades, oilmen and oilwomen have considered themselves a breed apart—tougher, braver, more honest. And now, in their moment of unparalleled power, it turns out they are not that different from everyone else. ■



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# Stanley Kauffmann on Films

## Beginnings

FEW BOOKS ARE born out of panic, but Stephen Lowenstein writes in his introduction that panic was the genesis of his book. Several years ago he was about to start directing his first film, a short: "On the first day of the shoot I awoke at around five-thirty in the morning ... in a state of blind panic." Later he wrote an article about the experience, then thought: "If it had been worth writing about the experience of making a small film, I realized that it would be worth recording the experiences of those whose debut feature films had made a splash and had launched their careers as film-makers on the world stage." Hence *My First Movie* (Pantheon, 458 pp., $27.50).

Lowenstein's book consists of interviews with twenty directors, well known and less known, on the subject of their first features. (The two Coen brothers are counted as one director.) Lowenstein, who lives in London, has worked on television documentaries and has made two short films of his own, so he was sufficiently experienced to ask germane questions that drew open responses—about his subjects' beginnings in the profession, how they were enabled to proceed, what the debut experience was like, what the results were. Of course no twenty interviews could be equally interesting; but there are spots of interest even in the slighter ones, most of them are better than that, and three of them are exceptional.

Lowenstein foresaw that he would have to ask some of the same questions of each person, so he took care to vary the approach and to let other questions, specific to the individual, grow out of the replies. The answers to the recurrent questions are surprising in two ways: in the degree to which they agree and in the degree to which they differ. Here is a sampling of the more unusual responses to some of the recurrent questions. (The films that I have cited for each director are subsequent work, not debut films.)

*On youthful film-going.* "I started going to the cinema in 1944 when I was three.... At school they would show you a film every Saturday, and repeat it on Sunday. So in fact, this was making me a rather informed scholar without my even being aware of it." (Stephen Frears, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Dangerous Liaisons.*) "I loved what I saw, but the idea that I could ultimately get to do that didn't occur to me. If you're growing up in Baltimore, who in the world is going to go into the film business?" (Barry Levinson, *Rain Man* and *Avalon.*) "We saw a lot of them [in Taiwan]. Mainly Hollywood and Chinese movies.... [But] I never really got into film until I failed my college examinations." (Ang Lee, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.*) "I wasn't one of those people who grew up knowing I was a film-maker.... I grew up in a small town, with one cinema, that was remote even in Indian terms.... At the age of twenty I found out what I wanted to do in my life." (Mira Nair, *Salaam Bombay!* and *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love.*)

*Financing the first film.* "It amazes me that any film gets made. Especially an independent film, because the bottom can drop out at any moment." (Steve Buscemi, *The Animal Factory.*) "Sam Raimi [the producer] had gone from dentist to dentist and local physicians to raise money." (Kevin Smith, *Clerks* and *Chasing Amy.*)

*Technical knowledge at the start.* "Nonexistent, basically. I hadn't got a clue about lenses. Zoom, prime lenses meant nothing to me." (Neil Jordan, *Michael Collins* and *The End of the Affair.*) "You say, let's do this. Then you take a look in the lens and see." (Levinson.)

*Arrival on the set for the first time.* "I remember Ethan and I driving to the set on the first day and both being impressed by the number of trucks." (Joel Coen, *Fargo* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) "God Almighty, all these trucks! They were all over the lot and I went 'Oh my God!' I think that got me more than anything else. Trucks!" (Levinson.)

*Confidence on the first day.* "I didn't feel confident at all. But then I never feel confident." (Ken Loach, *Riff-Raff* and *Raining Stones.*) "I felt in a real state of panic. But then you learn you just have to get on with it and make the thing." (Jordan.) "We were just about to go and [an actor] said, 'Are you nervous?' I said, 'I am absolutely terrified.' He said, 'Good. Never forget that.'" (Mike Figgis, *The Browning Version* and *Miss Julie.*)

Anecdotes glint throughout the book. Mike Figgis recounts how Tommy Lee Jones, who was in Figgis's first picture, compared the length of his trailer with Melanie Griffith's and wryly noted that hers was a foot longer. Anthony Minghella (*The English Patient* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*) was born into "a large extended Italian family" and says, "I'd come from this background of noise, very warm and typically Italian. The one thing I absolutely remember about the first day [of shooting] was being surrounded by what seemed to be hundreds of people ... and I thought, I feel quite comfortable with all this noise. Suddenly I was a boy sitting on my parents' kitchen table."

The three interviews that are most rewarding are by three of the most individualistic directors in the book. (Oliver Stone is their peer in this respect, but his interview is short and relatively gaunt.) Frears tells how he was first enamored of the theater, began directing plays at Cambridge, and eventually connected with the Royal Court Theatre in its highest days. Then Lindsay Anderson of that theater assigned him to be assistant to the film-maker Karel Reisz, who was directing a play, after which Reisz invited Frears to assist him on a film. This interview is not only a biopsic slice of the teeming English theater-film life in the 1950s and 1960s, it is an odd reversal of Lindsay Anderson's career. Anderson began in film, then was brought to the Royal Court; for Frears it was just the opposite. Pedro Almodóvar (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *Dark Habits*) makes a grand show these days of being glib and glossy. His best films are wittily yet almost lovingly anarchic, the work of a man who determined that the best course of dealing with the world is to ridicule it without forsaking it. The story of his long and grueling metamorphosis from his origin as an ignorant village kid to eminence as a sophisticated Madrid satirist discloses a courage that one might have thought he would be embarrassed to admit. Bertrand Tavernier (*Let Joy Reign Supreme* and *The Judge and the Assassin*) is distinguished in this book for one strong reason: his first film is a masterpiece. *The Clockmaker* shines on the roster of the best postwar French films. Tavernier's story of how he made his way toward it, through years of work as a film publicist, through years of passionate cinephilia, is especially engrossing because we are watching a premier artist achieve empowerment.

This struggle is an epitome of the book.



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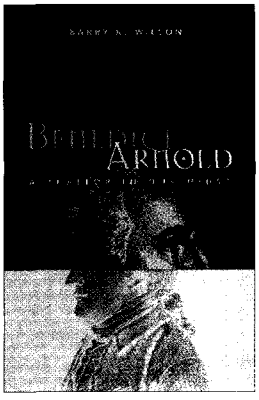


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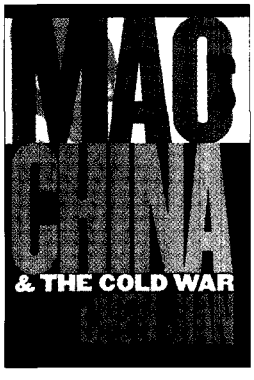


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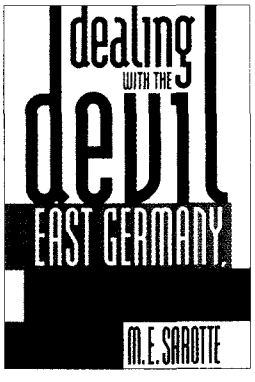


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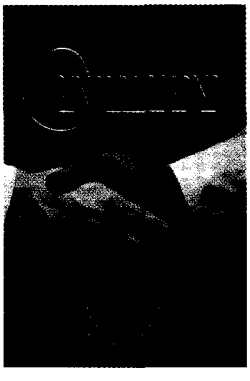

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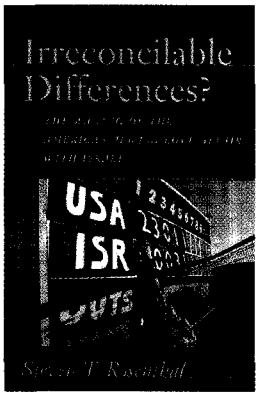


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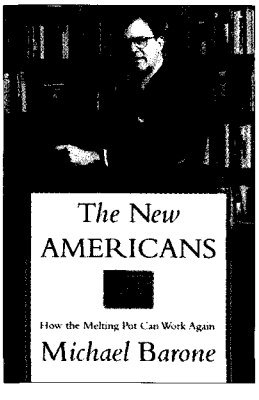


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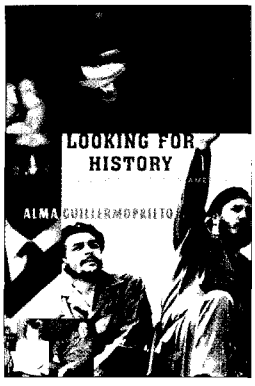


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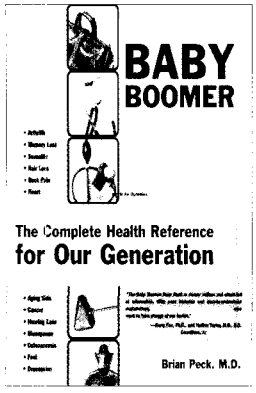


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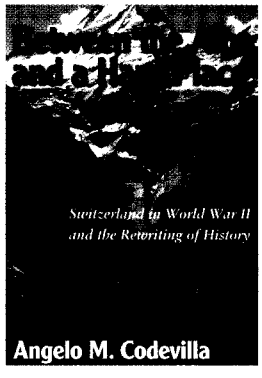


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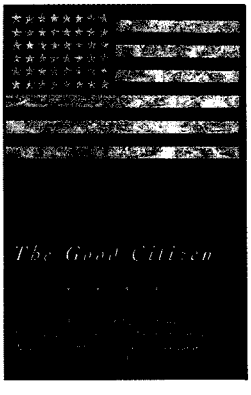


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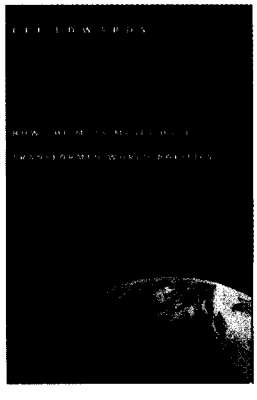

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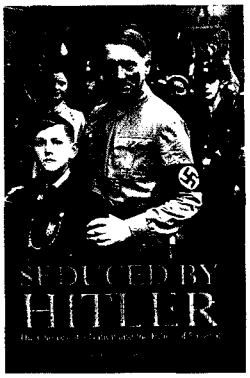


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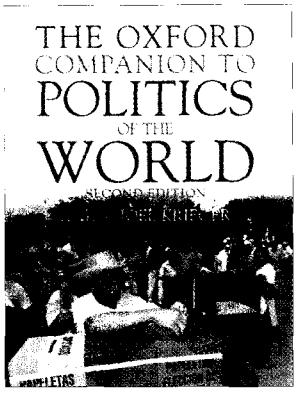


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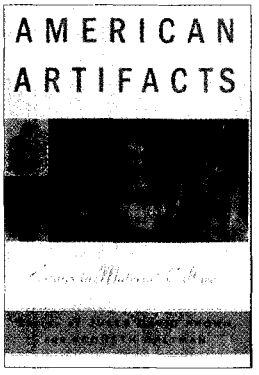


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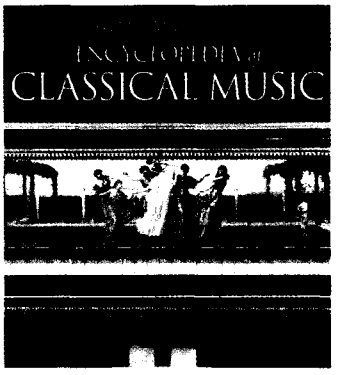


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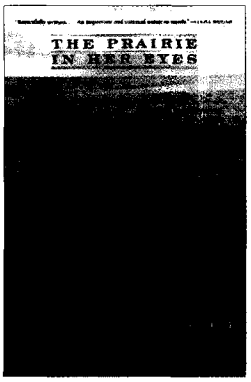


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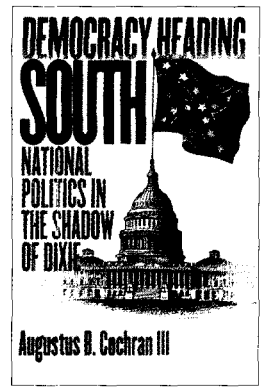


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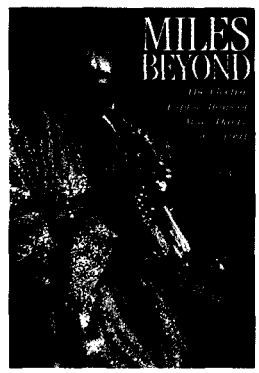


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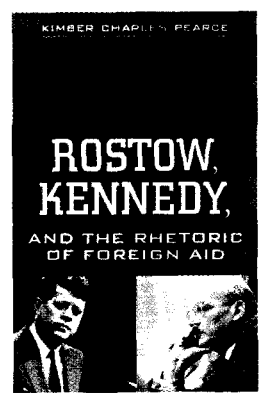


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Beneath all the replies jocular and grave, the anecdotes, the professional details, these twenty interviews are in some measure accounts of heroism. Whatever the measure of talent in a director, whatever the ultimate results of his struggle, the strictures of our society—cultural and financial—initially present an iron door to him on which is written: "Be superhuman. Or forget it." In our society every artist is an agonist; but the agon is harder for the artist who depends on others and on considerable money for the fulfillment of his work—outstandingly, the playwright, the composer, the architect, the film-maker. Lowenstein's book is, in a way, reassuring. These twenty people are only a few of our contemporaries who were willing to face what had to be faced, and they are (we are entitled to hope) an even smaller fraction of those who will come.

As envoi, an old Hollywood story. In 1947 Joseph Losey, who later made *The Servant* and *Accident*, was engaged to direct his first feature. He had been greatly experienced in the theater and in short films, but he was extremely nervous about this feature. On the day before he was to begin, he confessed his nervousness to Dore Schary, the producer who had engaged him. "Tomorrow," advised Schary, "after the first take of your first shot, say, 'Print it.' No matter whether it's good or bad or whatever, just say, 'Print it.'" "But why?" asked Losey. "Because," said Schary, "from then on everyone will think that you know what you're doing." ■

# Jed Perl on Art

## Off the Easel

THERE ARE VERY few surfaces, from vast walls to pages in books to men's and women's faces, that have not at one time or another been conceived as the support for a picture. Yet when painting is mentioned we still tend to think of a rectangle, two or four or six feet high, set in a frame and hung on a wall. This is what we call an easel painting. In a technical sense, an easel painting is nothing more than a painting of a size that an artist can comfortably fit on an easel; but of course easel painting suggests a whole range of possibilities and limitations. For its admirers, the easel painting has become a symbol of the independence of art, of the sense of art as a realm, with its own laws and its own logic, that is set apart, that is framed. For its detractors—and when there is talk of the death of painting, what is generally meant is the death of easel painting—the easel painting is exclusionary and reactionary, its frame a barrier meant to keep out many kinds of experience and forms of expression.

Both its admirers and its detractors know that easel painting, like any form, generates its own norms. But the story does not end there, because norms that last have a catalytic power. If easel painting has been a dominant mode, the very basis of picture-making, since sometime in the Renaissance, it has never remained the same for long. Paintings that are two feet high are very different from paintings that are eight feet high. The nature of the support, whether wood or canvas, can dramatically alter the character of the work. There is the question of the relationship between the size of the brushstroke and the size of the support, a relationship that, depending on how it is handled, can generate dramatic differences in internal scale. Our sense of the amplitude of the easel painting will also be affected by the illusion of depth that an artist chooses to create, which might suggest a few feet in a still life or miles in a landscape. Easel paintings have been used to present complex narratives and lyric evocations. They have been designed to be explored from left to right and from right to left. And sometimes, even with all the variables that are possible within easel painting, artists have found the easel painting inadequate to their needs, and have turned to the mural or the miniature, or to unconventionally shaped supports, or to some combination of painting and sculpture.

Picture-making that circumvents or defies or moves beyond easel painting is the subject of two important museum exhibitions this spring. Neither show will give comfort to those who seek confirmation of the oft-reported death of painting in the late twentieth century. These exhibitions call our attention to developments that took place one hundred and two hundred years ago respectively, and these dissents from the conventions of easel painting were in their own ways so intensely painterly as to reaffirm easel painting's possibilities by suggesting routes for renewal.

"BEYOND THE EASEL" is an exhibition of work done between 1890 and 1930 by Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard, Maurice Denis, and Ker-Xavier Roussel. The show focuses on large compositions, frequently executed for the homes of adventuresome collectors by a group of artists who banded together as the "Nabis" and remained fast friends all their lives. "Beyond the Easel" was at the Art Institute of Chicago this spring and opens at the Metropolitan Museum of Art at the end of June. The paintings gathered here, especially the ones by Bonnard and Vuillard, which are at the core of the show, bring all the metaphorical and narrative richness that we know from easel painting into the realm of decoration. The exhibition presents four artists who are pushing against the framing rectangle of the easel painting, and in doing so they suggest dissident instincts that have some deep, tangled roots. And considering that it is in the nature of dissident traditions to appear where they are least expected, I am not surprised to find that some of the issues that dominate "Beyond the Easel" are foreshadowed in the William Blake retrospective that is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art until June 24. (The Blake show was seen at Tate Britain in London last winter.)

Bonnard and Vuillard painted very big in these years, while even Blake's larger images are quite small; but the fascination with extremes of size and scale may be fueled by a related desire to shatter the norms. Although Blake saw himself as a printmaker and a painter, even his printed works tend to be heavily colored by hand, and all his printed and painted images are fueled by a revolt from what he felt to be the constraints of academic ideas of painting, which for him were epitomized by the *Discourses* that Reynolds had presented at Britain's nascent Royal Academy. Blake, who died in 1827 at the age of sixty-nine, never realized the large-scale paintings of which he sometimes dreamed; but he wanted, like Bonnard and Vuillard, to return to the art of painting a sense of the integration with architectural space that had been taken for granted in the Middle Ages. In his youth



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Blake had copied fourteenth-century wall paintings in Westminster Cathedral, and later in life he did a series of decorative paintings of famous poets for the library of his patron William Hayley—much as Vuillard created decorations for the home of the editor of *La Revue blanche*. As for Bonnard and Vuillard, they, too, were caught up in the experimental excitement of printmaking. Bonnard made a mark in Paris in the 1890s and early 1900s with astonishing color lithographs and designs for posters and book illustrations; and the playbills for the avant-garde Théâtre de l'Oeuvre that Vuillard did in 1893 and 1894 are among the most beautiful improvisational integrations of image and text since Blake's time.

CONSIDERING THAT WE are living in a time when the conventional wisdom in the art world has it that art is dominated by everything except painting, you might expect these shows to be embraced as early warnings of the dissolution of the hegemony of easel painting. But nothing could be further from the truth. These shows turn the "death of painting" arguments on their head by suggesting the multiple ways in which painting can be rediscovered when there is no easel in sight. Thinking about all of this, museumgoers who are familiar with the main trends in art criticism over the last half-century will be put in mind of Clement Greenberg's essay "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," published in *Partisan Review* in 1948. There Greenberg defined the easel picture as "cutting the illusion of a boxlike cavity into the wall ... and organizing within this cavity the illusion of forms, light, and space, all more or less according to the current rules of verisimilitude." Writing as what he called the "all-over" abstractions of de Kooning and Pollock were beginning to be known, Greenberg postulated the dissolution of the easel-painting illusion into an increasingly homogenous, polyphonic, wall-like image.

Greenberg was enthusiastic about much of what the crisis of the easel picture was producing. He particularly admired Pollock's dense skeins of paint, which he must have had in mind when he spoke of "this dissolution of the picture ... into the accumulation of similar units of sensation" as suggesting that "all hierarchical distinctions have been exhausted." Greenberg's essay, which displays his customary bolt-from-the-blue brilliance, was fueled by a need to see developments as one-way, as single-track. Reading his essay, you can see that Greenberg was not unaware of the dangers involved in the evisceration of the easel painting's stand-alone power; and yet there was something in him that was so excited by the crisis of the moment that he could not quite acknowledge the extent to which easel painting had always provoked, faced, and absorbed crises. He observed that the easel painting is a Western—a European—idea, and that Persian miniatures or Chinese scrolls are something else entirely; but he seems to have had a certain ambivalence about those earlier moments in the European tradition when artists had questioned or turned away from easel painting.

In 1948, there was a Bonnard show at the Museum of Modern Art. Greenberg reviewed it, and concluded that Bonnard "is almost a major painter, but not quite." I think Bonnard made Greenberg uncomfortable, because Greenberg knew that Bonnard had experienced the very crisis that Greenberg had described two months earlier in "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," except that in Bonnard's case the crisis provoked not a move into abstract simplification so much as a celebration of pastoral elaborations and a new kind of hallucinogenic naturalism. The 1940s was also a period when there was a great surge of interest in Blake in America, and his work suggests an even earlier crisis that Greenberg did not care to explore. In 1946, Alfred Kazin published *The Portable Blake* with a long introductory essay that reflected ideas developed in a seminar on Blake that Kazin taught at Black Mountain College, the North Carolina outpost of and training ground for New York's downtown avant-garde. Around the same time, Blake's technical feats as a printmaker were the subject of much speculation at Atelier 17, the printmaking studio that Stanley William Hayter ran in New York, where Pollock and many other artists came to do prints.

There were obviously some artists in New York who understood that Blake had found ways to express his dissatisfaction with the easel painting of his time by immersing himself in experiments with printmaking and illuminated books, and in dreams of vast mural decorations. Not unlike the artists in "Beyond the Easel," Blake was caught in a tug between tradition and experimentation: a tug that has no clear resolution and does not need one. Going through these shows, you do not have the seamless feeling of extraordinary challenges resolved, of everything coming together, that you may have had, say, at the Chardin retrospective last summer. Yet few exhibitions offer the kind of fascination that you can experience in watching Blake or Bonnard or Vuillard figure out how to make pictures outside of the context of easel painting.

Blake and the Nabis worked in different centuries and in different countries, under different conditions and with different expectations. And yet they are linked by their wide-ranging, freewheeling attitudes. For Blake, the rejection of the conventional techniques of printmakers and painters was part of a larger enterprise that involved rejecting conventional religious cosmologies and widely agreed upon interpretations of revered writers, especially Milton. Among the artists included in "Beyond the Easel," only Denis had a deep interest in Christianity, but they had all come of age amid a spirit of avant-gardist evangelicalism, and a Symbolist taste for back-to-the-sources explorations of faith; and the name they gave themselves, the Nabis, was derived from the Hebrew word for prophet. With Bonnard and Vuillard, as with Blake, an interest in the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance was mixed with a fascination with older Mediterranean traditions and with the abstractness of Greco-Roman linear decoration. The Nabis had also felt the impact of a contemporary taste for the enveloping decorative schemes of the eighteenth-century rococo. It is true that we do not tend to think of Blake in relation to that light, arabesque-filled style; but his minglings of vines and curling figures do echo the rococo style—and a nascent rococo interest in medievalism that was very much in the air in England in the late eighteenth century.

BLAKE, THE MAN who saw the world in a grain of sand, once wrote that "Fresco Painting is Like Miniature Painting; a Wall is a Large Ivory." In part he was saying that both use exact outlines, and are thus utterly unlike the Venetian oil paintings, the archetypal easel paintings, which he disliked for what he regarded as their vague translucency. "Fresco Painting is the Most Minute," he wrote. Yet there is also a sense in which Blake was saying that both the fresco painted on the wall and the image carved on a tiny piece of ivory have a physicality that defies the illusionism of the easel painting, which is, after all, supposed to dissolve the truth of the wall in favor of the illusion of a window.

For Blake, the very physicality of his materials—paints, inks, acids with which he etched copper plates—seemed to assure the authenticity of the artistic process. The same can be said for Bonnard and Vuillard. Vuillard was so skeptical about the wishy-washy translucency of oil that he did many of his paintings in a glue-based medium known as distemper, achieving a matte effect that recalls some of Blake's experimental media. And in their search for alternatives to the easy illusionism of easel painting Bonnard and Vuillard made screens and designed stained-glass windows. Vuillard produced



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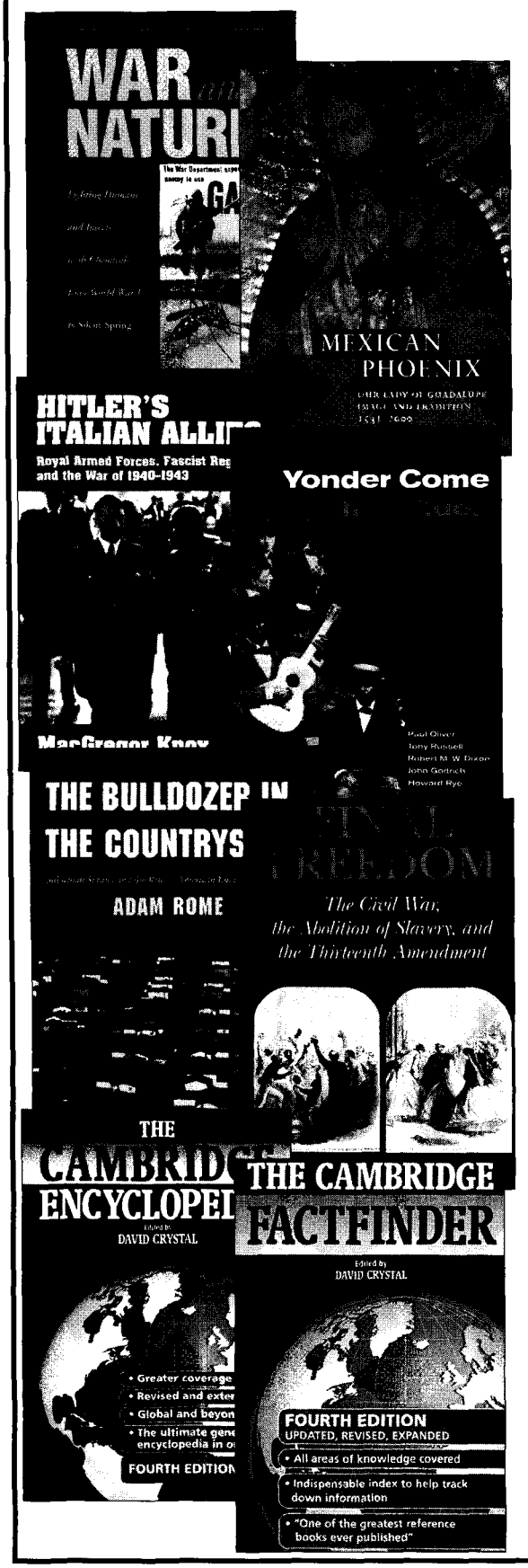
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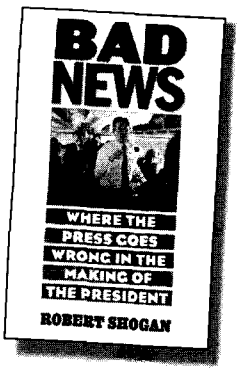


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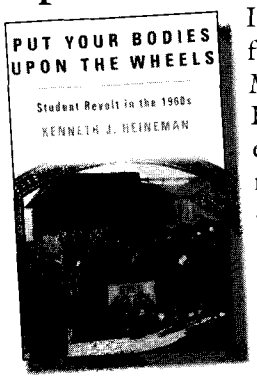


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a porcelain dinner service for his friend the collector Jean Schopfer, who also bought three decorative panels. For the Nabis, as for Blake, art not only suggested a worldview, it also suggested a way of changing the way everything in the world looked.

YOU MIGHT EXPECT Blake's versatility to have some special appeal for museumgoers, and yet the retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art seems to be received without much warmth. Middle-aged visitors, arriving with some vague memory of the acid-rock reputation that Blake had in the 1960s, may be a little stunned by his gravity, by his ferocity. The current fashion in Blake scholarship is to argue that he is less of a stand-alone eccentric and more of a figure of his time than earlier critics were inclined to believe. This contextualization of Blake follows the general drift of thinking in academia, where there is a tendency to argue that everybody somehow fits in somewhere, now that marginalization has been routinized and repackaged as the mainstream. Yet visitors to the Met's galleries can see that this was a man with some exceedingly strange obsessions. For those who have rejected whatever they ever knew of R. D. Laing and Norman O. Brown and now believe that normal is nice, Blake will seem an equivocal figure. American viewers may be tempted to imagine that only the English really love Blake, but in London last fall my impression was that Blake burnout had set in there, too. (The show was organized in England by a team that included Robin Hamlyn, Michael Phillips, and Christine Riding; the reduced version in New York was overseen by Elizabeth Barker, assistant curator of drawings and prints at the Metropolitan.)

There is something essentially unsettled about Blake's achievement. It is impossible not to be confounded by the finickiness that is an integral element of his grandeur. He is a genius, sure; but he is also the kind of man who builds the wonders of the world out of toothpicks. The small size of his images and his often obsessive attention to detail are not inconsistent with our sense of the man who was trained in the dogged close-work of the engraver and lived all his life in straitened circumstances. There is a withheld intensity, the sense of a vehemence that is clothed in a modesty that has been forced upon him. Blake was apprenticed to an engraver at the age of fourteen; he struggled all his life to make a decent living and never really did. Yet within the tight physical circumference of his work there is compressed an astonishing argument not only for the unity of the arts—poetry, printmaking, painting—but also for the unity of art, religion, philosophy, and politics.

That so much could be included in such a small compass can be regarded as a demonstration of the truth of Blake's core belief in the unity of opposites. In *Milton*, he writes that "there is a place where Contrarieties are equally true," and certainly his own paintings and prints are places where grandeur and intimacy, contrary visual values, can be equally true. Blake's contrarieties are evident also in the way that his most rivetingly personal images are often composed of elements that have a stock feeling. Kazin observed of Blake's poetry that he "is not interested in character," and you certainly sense this in his paintings and his drawings, where the figures can sometimes seem like mere place markers in a grand game.

Blake's muscular men and reedy women are often little more than Neoclassical boilerplate circa 1800, and they can feel as if they were taken directly from the line illustrations that his friend John Flaxman had done for Dante and Homer. Yet the very abstractness of Blake's figures underscores their power as signs and symbols, as forces with parts to play in a private cosmic drama. The diagrammatic quality of the figures makes us feel as if Blake is patiently limning the elements in his own homegrown tantric charts. At least this is how I react to the cycle of large, elaborately painted prints of biblically based subjects, such as *Elohim Creating Adam*, from around 1800; and to the elegant, almost grisaille pen-and-watercolor illustrations for *Paradise Lost* from 1808; and to the phantasmagoric illustrations for Dante done in the 1820s. The anti-naturalism of the arrangements and the sense of the figures as stacked or lined up in some mystical array suggest the formality of a madman organizing his fever dreams. And when Blake presses these figures into pinwheels or whirlpools of activity, as in some of the Dante illustrations, there can be a terror to the elegantly plotted turmoil.

THE DENSITY OF Blake's compositions is astounding, and it matches the labyrinthine strangeness of his personal cosmologies, which he meant to have the stately drama of the Old Testament, the *Divine Comedy*, and *Paradise Lost*. The cosmic weirdness of his later poetry can send your mind spinning, what with his elaborate mythological cast of characters: Urizen, a tyrannical, rationalist law-giver; Orc, symbol of much that is positive and life-giving in the world; Los, who embodies time and prophecy; and his consort Enitharmon, who affirms the imaginative power of the artist. Such fig-



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ures belong to nobody but Blake—but then so does his Milton, who is a great poet liberated from the Puritan theology that Blake, a prophet of freedom in art, politics, and sexuality, could not countenance. Both in poetry and in painting, Blake can exhaust us with the almost nonstop inventiveness with which he elaborates and interweaves his figures and his legends; and the man's crazy imaginative energy is paralleled, in his work as a printmaker, by the dazzling ingenuity that he brought to developing techniques that are uniquely his own.

Blake's illuminated books were created using a relief printing technique that he invented. Instead of etching lines on copper plates and then printing an image from ink rubbed into those lines, Blake etched around his letters and pictures, creating a relief plate. A whole shelfful of scholarly books has been devoted to Blake's experimental printing techniques, and sometimes you do not know whether to wonder at the man's imaginativeness or at his doggedness. He had to write hundreds of lines backwards in a sort of acid-resistant paint, then etch the copper plates, and then re-etch them to heighten the relief. Often these images, once printed, went through the press a second time, now with a variety of colors applied directly to the copper plate in a process not unlike monoprint, which created a densely colored effect that a contemporary of Blake's referred to as an "imitation of fresco." Finally, nearly all the plates were hand-colored, generally by Blake or his wife. And there were other techniques that he developed, such as an incised-line method that makes prints that look somewhat like scratchboards, with the plate darkly inked overall and an image emerging in white lines. If all this were not enough, Blake late in life did a single series of tiny wood engravings, pastoral settings to illustrate a poem in the manner of Virgil, which have had a lasting influence on English landscape artists and may well be the most admired wood engravings to be created anywhere between the Renaissance and the late nineteenth century.

BLAKE REVOLTED AGAINST the dainty over-refinement that he felt had infected printmaking in his time. He loathed the soft, elaborately atmospheric effects of mezzotints and stipple engravings, with their virtuosic imitations of oil-paint effects, even though as a commercial engraver he could bring off such effects when they were what paying customers required. Blake revered the tougher, more unabashedly graphic impact of Dürer and other Renaissance printmakers, whose work he had collected since he was a boy. And his preferences were given urgency because he felt that there was a metaphysics to printmaking. For Blake, the acid that bit into the copper plate suggested nothing less than a conflict between good and evil.

"The notion that man has a body distinct from his soul," Blake wrote, "is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid." This idea has been linked to Blake's reading of Locke, who had speculated, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, that "the Mind ... be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without Ideas; How comes it to be furnished?... from Experience." But I also hear echoes of Michelangelo's poetry in Blake's sense that an artistic process—in this case, the biting of a plate—frees the artistic spirit. In the sonnets, Michelangelo wrote of the sculptor liberating the body from a block of stone, and saw this process as suggesting how (in John Frederick Nims's new translation) "my soul's better traits/quiver beneath the excess/of the burdensome cadaver's gloomy weight." Within the restricted dimensions of his copper plates, Blake wrests a drama of coming-into-being that has its own Michelangelesque grandeur. There is a physicality to the illuminated books that gives them a power beyond anything in the unique images in watercolor or tempera.


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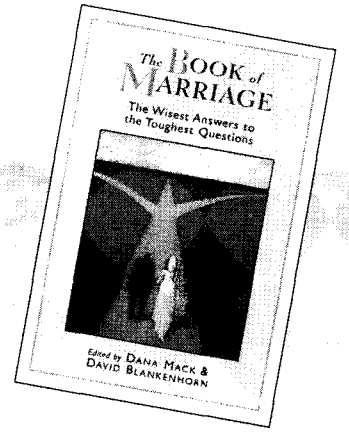


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Many of Blake's illuminated books exist in fewer than a dozen copies. Each one is different. In a new book, *William Blake: The Creation of the* Songs *from Manuscript to Illuminated Printing* (Princeton University Press), Michael Phillips, one of the curators of the Blake show, demonstrates how Blake intensified the metaphorical implications of his great cycle by coloring the early copies of *Songs of Innocence* with only a light wash of watercolor and then giving the early copies of *Songs of Experience* heavier printed color and then watercolor. Never in the history of printmaking has technique had so forceful a metaphorical impact, for whereas the visual images of innocence are all translucency and evanescence, the visual images of experience are earthbound, impacted. (The complete copy of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* at the Metropolitan was colored very late in Blake's life, and unfortunately has a porcelain sweetness and a uniformity missing in the copies finished earlier.)

When Blake worked with copper, acid, colored ink, paper, and printing press, he achieved an unparalleled, forged-in-pressure drama, a sense of being involved with almost primordial processes. And his color, whether it is the watercolor washes over printing or the colors printed directly from the plate, has a thrilling abandon. The installation of the far smaller New York version of the Blake retrospective provides an admirable clarity, but I did miss the experience of going through a late illuminated book such as *Milton* page by page, as I could do at the Tate. And while no reproduction can match the textural complexity of these unique printed objects, the new *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* (Thames and Hudson) can give a sense of that experience.

BLAKE BELIEVED THAT the obliteration of clear outline in the painterly traditions of the later Renaissance was the downfall of pictorial art, and in his illuminated books he uses the power of the printed contour as a scaffolding that emancipates him as a colorist with a near-abstract feeling for the symbolic impact of hue. In pictures and poetry, Blake's imagination tends to run to juxtapositions and unfoldings and mirrorings and overlappings that work especially well in the pages of a book, where the idea of thematic development takes on a dramatic physicality. I am astonished at the way he moves through full pages of text to half-page and full-page illustrations, and knits the whole together into a richly idiosyncratic creation—an adventure that Blake apparently never felt could be entirely resolved, considering that over the years he played with the order of pages in certain books, with inclusions and exclusions, with different colors of ink and different approaches to the hand-coloring.

While the earliest of the illuminated books, *Songs of Innocence*, has some of the quality of a medieval book of hours, in many of the books Blake's feeling for textures and surfaces takes on an energy that has nothing to do with historical precedent. In one plate of *The First Book of Urizen*, the heavily bearded protagonist is submerged in oceanic waters, and the blue-green-black water (it is different in the printing of different copies) is made palpable through the dense, almost stuccoed surface of the printing process; the image has a daring modernity. *The First Book of Urizen* is more picture than text, but in such later books as *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, with their dense pages of text printed in Blake's inimitable calligraphic hand, word and image become twinned graphic forces emerging triumphant from the bath of acid and the weight of the press. Once you read a page or two of *Milton* in the illuminated form, the words bare on a page are a comedown. It is as if the sheer labor of making these illustrated books gave a reality to Blake's wildest imaginings.

William Blake, "The Sea of Time and Space," 1821

Blake's illuminated *Milton* is a glorious fever dream. The images are daringly physical, beginning with the naked Milton, a muscular hero untroubled by the fire and smoke that surround him. Later Milton battles with the colossal Urizen, while five angelically youthful figures (the five senses) hover somewhere above, playing musical instruments. In *Milton* such full-page illustrations, with their bold outlines, deep coloring, and Michelangelesque confrontations, are contrasted with a pastoral vision that was probably inspired by the Sussex village of Felpham, where Blake was living in the years when he wrote the poem. The famous half-page illustration of Blake, in front of his modest Felpham cottage, receiving a visitation by the floating virgin Ololon has a once-upon-a-time simplicity that recalls primitive chapbook illustrations, but the primitiveness is underlined with a sophistication that leaps forward, prefiguring Gauguin's Tahiti. Blake includes some images of Druid monuments, with bold silhouettes reminiscent of Stonehenge. And there is an extraordinary visual power even to the pages of *Milton* that are pure text, with only the overall wash of watercolor and perhaps the minute marginalia of a twirling figure or a bit of foliage. On one page, a rainbow is watercolored over the text; but even when all Blake has done is to dab some touches of red, yellow, and blue across his text the effect can be riveting, startlingly close to the effects that Turner was achieving in watercolor around the same time. In dashing a few colors over a page of text Blake seems to be offering an abstraction of a sky.

The freedom of Blake's coloring in the illuminated books is one of the glories of late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century art. The individualism



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of his technique is fueled by a desire to recapture some primordial sense of materials, a sense of incising and coloring as primal acts. I am reminded that in prehistoric art, carving and painting were not always distinct activities. While Blake's insistence on dodging the constraints of easel painting relates to a Neoclassical or early Romantic skepticism about the hard-won artifices of the High Renaissance, his experimental feeling for materials can also seem to prefigure the "let's try it" spirit of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century art. No doubt André Breton had something like this in mind when he placed Blake among the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artists and writers whom "an insatiable desire carries to the verge of discovery."

SET AT THE beginning of the nineteenth century, Blake's illuminated books—like the large decorative paintings that Bonnard and Vuillard did roughly a hundred years later—can define the outer limits of a century during which easel painting went through profounder changes than it had since the days of Poussin and Rembrandt. If Blake's sense of line and color are inseparable from the printer's craft, Bonnard's sense of color was also affected by printmaking, by his early work in color lithography, which suggested a freedom for color not unlike Blake's. And if poetry gave Blake the subjects for his pictures, we must not forget that Bonnard and Vuillard were immersed in the spirit of Mallarmé and Symbolism.

When Gide, who knew and admired Bonnard, first read Blake at the beginning of World War I, he counted it a fresh discovery; but the whole Romantic idea of a cosmology that could be at once private and public was well established in France, where Wagnerism was at its height. Redon, an older artist who inhabits the same Symbolist world as the young Bonnard and Vuillard, had been dubbed a "French Blake" in an article by Arthur Symons that appeared in London in 1890. And if you consider the formative impact that Gauguin had on Bonnard and Vuillard, you find a truly Blakean connection. Gauguin, like Blake, was fascinated by Swedenborg; he, too, dreamed up his own cosmologies; and he, too, was an avid experimental printmaker who created, in *Noa Noa*, a book that in its originality of image and text parallels some of Blake's books. Maurice Denis recalled of Gauguin that "he was fiercely individualistic, and yet he clung to popular traditions of the most anonymous, collective sort. We deduced laws, lessons, a method, from these contradictions." That sounds like a description of somebody not entirely unlike Blake.


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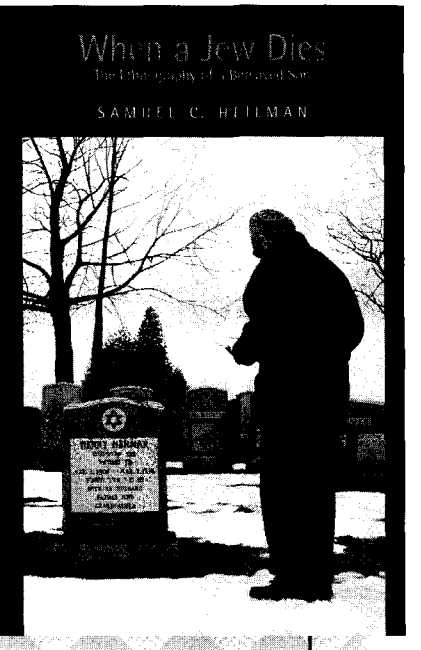


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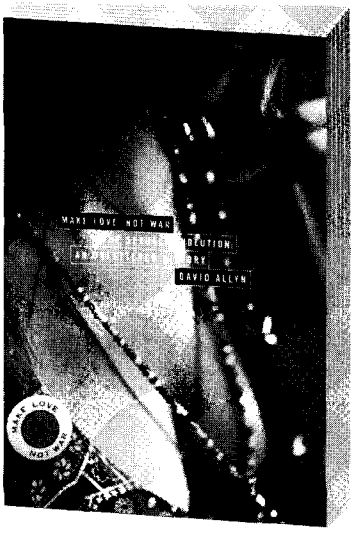


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If both the Blake retrospective and "Beyond the Easel" are museum experiences with some rough edges, this is how it ought to be, for the exact parameters of these achievements remain unclear. What is clear is that "Beyond the Easel" is a show that cracks a subject open, and it is in the nature of such an event that it can feel both overwhelming and insufficient. Decorative or mural-scale paintings are not works that museumgoers often consider, but once you begin to think about the interest of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century artists in going beyond the easel, the show can barely do its subject justice. In any event, the story actually goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when Delacroix devoted some of his most focused energy to the union of painting and architecture. Mural painting also defined the Neoclassical ambitions of Puvis de Chavannes, a much-admired figure among the late-nineteenth-century avant-garde. Gauguin, in Brittany and more extensively later in the South Seas, was intensely interested in decorative schemes, often uniting painting and carving. Matisse's vast paintings *Dance* and *Music* are contemporaneous with the decorations in "Beyond the Easel," as are, of course, Monet's *Waterlilies*. In Chicago, where the show was organized by Gloria Groom (a curator in the Art Institute's department of European painting), a sort of orientation room at the beginning of the show contained works by Puvis, Gauguin, and others and suggested some of this history; but no show could possibly tell the whole story. (Rebecca A. Rabinow, of the Metropolitan's department of European painting, is responsible for the show in New York.)

"Beyond the Easel" is an admirably ambitious exhibition, but it might have had a clearer shape if the organizers had not felt the need to give this history a revisionist spin by evaluating Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel "in the wake of postmodernism" and "in a broader context which embraces their subsequent development of styles marginalized by modernism, notably Impressionism and classicism." There is no question that the achievements included here, especially some of Vuillard's work, have been undervalued by conventional modern taste; but when "the wake of postmodernism" means that Roussel's potboilers receive close to equal billing with Vuillard's masterpieces, I begin to feel nostalgic for the orthodox modernism of half a century ago, when the Museum of Modern Art somehow saw fit to present a Vuillard retrospective in New York.

"Beyond the Easel" presents a quartet of artists who are simply too unequally matched to make satisfying sense. Bonnard and Vuillard are remarkable figures. Denis is, intermittently in the earliest part of his career, a man with interesting visual ideas, though he never has a feeling for paint that can quite bring his ideas to life. And Roussel's work here, aside from a single stained-glass design, is meretricious. Going through "Beyond the Easel" can be like listening to a string quartet in which two of the members can barely play. It is a huge relief when, after a while, Roussel and Denis more or less disappear.

Denis, Vuillard, and Roussel (born in 1870, 1868, and 1867 respectively) got to know each other when they were boys, studying at the Lycée Condorcet. Bonnard (born in 1867) came into the group when he met Denis at the Académie Julian in the late 1880s. Their friendships were enduring; you get the feeling of a big-hearted amiability that survived everything. (Vuillard died in 1940, Denis in 1943, Roussel in 1944, and Bonnard in 1947.) Bonnard and Vuillard seem to have had a modesty about them that is somewhat unexpected in a period that gave birth to the gargantuan egos of Matisse and Picasso. From the 1890s all the way into the 1920s, these extraordinarily original artists were less intent on defining some unique artistic position than on absorbing and commenting on a complex cultural moment.

The social and intellectual world out of which the work in "Beyond the Easel" emerged was a rich one, and a great deal of what was going on in art and literature flowed into the painting. Much of the excitement centered around *La Revue blanche*, which by 1891 was run by a triumvirate of brothers, Thadée, Alexandre, and Alfred Natanson. Misia Natanson, married to Thadée at the time, was also an important figure in the group, and she remained close to Bonnard through the various marital complexities that followed her divorce from Thadée. *La Revue blanche* embraced Symbolism in art and progressivism in politics. Vuillard and Bonnard were also caught up in the revolutionary transformations of the theater in those days, which ranged from pioneering productions of Ibsen to Alfred Jarry's absurdist *Ubu Roi*. Bonnard's work during these early years suggests a giddy experimentational approach (which was not emphasized anywhere near enough in the Bonnard retrospective three years ago at the Museum of Modern Art). And there are several rooms of Vuillard's work in "Beyond the Easel" that will give people a sense of his greatness, and prepare the way for the long-awaited Vuillard retrospective that will open at the National Gallery in Washington in 2003.

If museumgoers think of Vuillard at all, they probably think of some of his small, dark, tightly packed images of fin-de-siècle interiors. In the series of five large paintings called *Album*, executed in 1895 for Thadée and Misia Natanson's apartment, those effects are multiplied to create a muffled panorama. No one really knows how these paintings were meant to be arranged in the Natansons' open-plan, bohemian interior—but then the controlled chaos of Vuillard's decorative panels was probably designed to hold up a mirror to the Natansons' informal lifestyle. Out of Vuillard's quietly luxuriant color orchestration—his browns, reds, oranges, and purples suggest the autumnal mood of a Japanese screen—emerges a slow-motion rush of images, including everything we might see as we survey a crowded room.

The surfaces of these paintings are packed with details, juxtapositions, fragments, so that we feel the competing pressures of multiplying naturalistic detail, of women's hands and faces, of overlapping bodies, of vases full of flowers, of whitish sunlight and equally white chrysanthemums, of the silhouettes of pieces of furniture, of the cacophony of patterns on clothes, wallpaper, table coverings. There occurs a kind of democratization of impressions. One thing is as important as the next. Yet the result is not the collapse of representation so much as a sense of representation freed from its own conventions, as if the full discord of sensuous experience could simply no longer be presented in some neatly ordered way.

"Beyond the Easel" offers a second strong impression of Vuillard's work, through the Parisian cityscapes that he did a few years later, at the beginning of the new century. Here he shows us streets and parks, either seen from a window a few stories up or from a street-level seat in a café. We have moved from the puzzle-like space of the Natansons' interiors to a daringly panoramic space, and still Vuillard insists on recording the diffusion of activity, only now the democratization of incident doubles as a topology of perspectival experience. The paintings suggest the moment when you look out of a window and have the sense that you can see everything at once. The autumn-leaves tonalities of Vuillard's interiors are replaced by harmonies of greens, browns, blues, and grays that keep resolving into the warm terra-cotta tone of the paper on which many of these paintings are done. This is an anti-Romantic kind of color, but it yields hauntingly subtle effects of shifting Parisian weather. The paintings survey the everyday dazzle of early-twentieth-century Paris, and Vuillard's genius is in the way he allows us to savor the eye-filling moment, in the way that



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Pierre Bonnard, "Mediterranean," 1911

he slows things down while permitting none of the richness of the scene to slip away. In his elongated vertical formats Vuillard suggests a deep dive into space; and when those vertical panels are joined into screens, the plunge is complicated by an accordion-like counter-pressure, creating a spatial tug-of-war.

Perhaps even more radical in its rendering of quotidian vision is Vuillard's *Place St.-Augustin* (1912–1913), one-half of a diptych some five feet high. Here we are at street level, and it is as if there is no subject to speak of, no person or incident that we focus on, so that the empty café chairs and tables and a bottle of seltzer set on one of those tables become the subject. It is paintings such as this one, with its subdued gray-and-brown tonality, that inspired Fairfield Porter's comment that "only Vuillard could make a masterpiece that in all superficial ways resembles a magazine illustration, in all ways except in everything."

There is ordinariness here, but it is the grandeur of ordinariness. This painting, with its more or less empty foreground, is a startlingly original subject, so plain that we can miss its daring. The radicalism is in the plainness. Vuillard has put us in the position of the person who sits in the café, watching nothing in particular—which is also everything, because there turns out to be a great deal going on in the Place St.-Augustin. The idea of using this sweep of space as a theme or motif will be picked up by Giacometti fifty years later, in some of the studies of streets and cafés that he did for his album of lithographs *Paris sans fin*.

VUILLARD'S WAY OF unfolding a moment over the length and breadth of a painting may bring to mind Bonnard's masterworks of the 1930s and 1940s, and there are surely many structural affinities between the work of these two artists who were such good friends. But in the first quarter of the century Bonnard's largest paintings often suggest a rather different idea, an interest in timeless and even mythic effects that is closer to the ambitions of Denis than to Vuillard (though Denis never came anywhere near Bonnard's easygoing originality). Bonnard's *Mediterranean* (1911), with its three panels, each approximately thirteen feet high and five feet wide, designed to be set between columns to give the illusion of a great porch, is his view of the south of France in the early twentieth century. But it also displays something of the grandeur of a décor for an ancient palace, with its baked golden light and the extraordinary size of the trees that dwarf the children at play.

If, for Vuillard, an expansive decorative format provided a way of going deeper into the quotidian, decorative surfaces acted for Bonnard almost in reverse, giving everyday events a mythological dimension. The demands of working on this scale pushed Bonnard to a less



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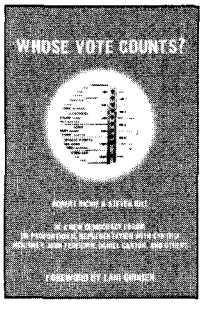


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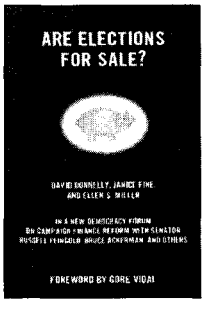


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conscientious naturalism, a more casually inscribed way of handling paint. Looking at *Mediterranean*, which is in places barely covered with paint, one is reminded that fresco was, at least at the beginning of the Renaissance, an inexpensive and informal medium, a way of filling space fast. There is a witty, inspired utilitarianism to Bonnard's handling of paint, and it foreshadows the offhand sumptuousness of his later, greater work.

THE PASTORAL CLASSICISM that is latent in *Mediterranean* is overt in some of Bonnard's other decorations from these years, where invocations of the ancient world are intertwined with naturalistic observations so acute that they cannot but suggest the present. Between 1906 and 1910, Bonnard worked on a series of paintings for Misia, now married to Alfred Edwards, the millionaire who owned *Le Matin*. These coppery-toned paintings, with their slightly comic gatherings of nymphs and assorted animals and maybe the occasional man, are often seen as uncharacteristic of Bonnard, as a concession to his friend Misia's self-dramatizing, hedonistic spirit. Perhaps that was how they struck the visitors to her dining room, who included Stravinsky, Strauss, Ravel, Diaghilev, Gide, and Proust. Certainly nothing else in Bonnard looks anything like the zigzagging borders of monkeys, birds, and strands of pearls with which he circles these paintings. These borders are out of some crazy-sublime Hawaiian-themed cocktail lounge; but then Bonnard was not quite the Zen priest of late Impressionism that sophisticated New Yorkers sometimes imagine him to have been.

The eccentric framing of these scenes with boisterous, night-clubby imagery strikes me as having a serio-comic purpose: it is a way of unframing a moment, of letting out the pressure, so that Bonnard's themes can begin to warp and to mingle. In Misia's decorations, the bathing nymphs, the ornamental chariot, and the dancers in filmy dresses, while set in a timeless place, also toss off flashes of early-twentieth-century style. This would have amused Misia—and Bonnard, too. The nymphs stretch in ways that recall a lover in one of Bonnard's absolutely up-to-date bedrooms; the middle-aged women in garments rather like togas might actually be wearing the latest in haute couture; and the fountain and the garden in one painting turn out to be based on the grounds of the Bonnard family's country home.

This impression of time simultaneously moving backward and forward is even stronger in a cycle of paintings that Bonnard did between 1916 and 1920 for Josse and Gaston Bernheim, owners of the gallery Bernheim-Jeune. The panels, which Bonnard designed for the vestibule of the Bernheim home, range from a ravishing springtime vista, which could as easily be 500 B.C. as 2000 A.D., to a bustling urban scene, which we know represents the present, because of the woman in high heels, the kiosk loaded with newspapers and magazines, the workers in their striped shirts, and an angular metal structure that rises out of the river. Vuillard admired the "unity" of this ensemble, but in a catalogue entry Gloria Groom observes that the paintings "in fact represent antithetical themes—city and country, work and leisure, the man-made and the natural, north . . . and south, the contemporary and the timeless." Groom, a sensitive commentator, might have emphasized a bit more what Vuillard (like Blake) understands, which is that antitheses can make unities. The woman in the cloche and black high heels in *Workers on the Seine* might well be the same woman who in *Earthly Paradise* reclines naked, her arms flung behind her head, looking up at the sky, while her lover contemplates the purple distance. *Pastoral Symphony* suggests the kind of day in the country that is so ravishingly beautiful that time stops in its tracks. And even *Monuments*, the fourth panel, with its classical statuary suggesting some Greco-Roman port city, refuses to remain fixed in time and space, for it is as much a salute to De Chirico's metaphysical spirit as to the particulars of the ancient world.

BONNARD'S MIX OF myth and modernity is absolutely of his time, the time of Joyce's *Ulysses*, of Yeats's *Celtic Twilight*, of Gide's classicism. Joyce's use of a Homeric substructure was a way of shaking up the naturalistic novel, much as for Bonnard pastoral conventions and classical myths could suggest a way out of the representational norms of nineteenth-century easel painting. The idea that naturalistic particulars could be given other-than-naturalistic resonances was one of the lessons of Gauguin and Symbolism, which had grown out of the soil of Romanticism; and that carries us back to Blake, in whose poetry and pictures times and places are united in utterly unexpected ways.

Blake liked to imagine his mythic figures appearing on ordinary London streets. He wrote that "Malah's on Blackheath; Rahab & Noah dwell on Windsor's heights,/Where once the Cherubs of Jerusalem spread to Lambeth's Vale." Kazin commented of such juxtapositions that Blake tries "to impose the massive structure of his hazardously built myth onto the contemporary world," and makes



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"the bewildering jump from Old Testament names to English streets, cities, and counties." Bonnard is as far as one can imagine from Blake's fiery emotions, yet he, too, "hazardously built myth onto the contemporary world," imagining a nymph in his own backyard or, later on, in a modern bathroom with shiny tile walls.

For Blake as well as for the artists in "Beyond the Easel," the escape from the easel pulls the lid off. New things slip in. Old things slip in. The old becomes new. There is something wildly playful about all of this; and it is worth recalling that Bonnard and Vuillard, like Blake before them, had an abiding interest in the playfulness of childhood—in the child's immediacy of experience and freedom from grown-up attitudes. You might say that easel painting is the kind of painting that grown-ups do, while it is children who scribble in books and draw on walls. The purity of first experiences is something we immediately associate with Blake; his work has a charged children's-book directness. But Vuillard and Bonnard also showed a special affinity with the directness of childhood experiences, in their paintings of children playing in parks that are not unlike Blake's echoing green, and in interiors in which Vuillard skews the entire perspective to give us the vantage point of the child sitting in the middle of the carpet. Bonnard's first illustrated book, *Petit solfège illustré* (1893), was his *Songs of Innocence*: a music primer for children. Working on it, Bonnard wrote to Vuillard that "I have to think of the decorators of ancient missals, or of the art that the Japanese put into the decoration of encyclopedic dictionaries to give myself some courage." Five years later, for another friend, Bonnard did a baby announcement that combines an infant's profile and calligraphic text with a Blakean tenderness.

Romanticism, Symbolism, childhood, and the escape from easel painting make a heady mix. If you let these exhibitions work on you, you may find that on leaving them you are more confused than you were when you arrived. And why not? At both these shows, the unrestrained eccentricity of the dissent from easel painting is unavoidable; but when you consider how much flows, at least subterraneanly, from these artists, you may discern the revitalizing powers of a kind of eccentricity that is grounded securely in tradition.

It would be wrong to define the dissent from easel painting in too limited a way. In the subtitle of "Beyond the Easel" these works are referred to as "decorative paintings," and that term, although it is apt and probably inevitable, also has a barbed meaning. For "decorative" has come to suggest, in part through Clement Greenberg's use of the word, a rejection of narrative or metaphor. Yet the decorative instinct in Blake, in Bonnard, and in Vuillard, even as it foreshadows abstraction, also reactivates narrative and metaphor—and suggests the place of narrative and metaphor within abstraction. The implications of all of this are vast, and encompass not only the huge internal scale that Paul Klee brought to his smallest paintings but also Matisse's experiments with mingling handwriting and drawing in his illustrated books.

What Blake, Bonnard, and Vuillard have done is not to dump art's rule book so much as to go into the rule book and move everything around. Painting shrinks to the size of a page or expands to fill a wall. For Blake, Michelangelo becomes a medieval miniaturist. Bonnard and Vuillard take naturalistic conventions and simultaneously compress them and stretch them. At a time when museumgoers are said to be unshockable, these are shows that can still have people doing double takes. We are accustomed to artists who reject painting altogether, but we are still unaccustomed to artists who are inside painting in their own way. There is an outrageousness about much of the work in these shows, but it is a restrained outrageousness. This may be the only kind of outrageousness that really counts. ■


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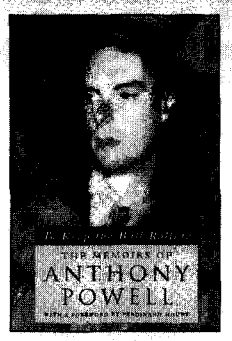


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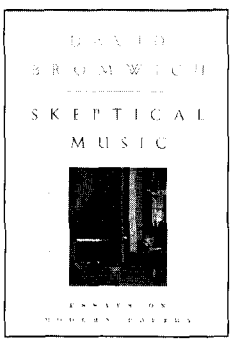


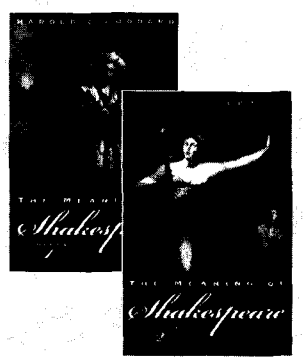

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# The War Between the Tates

*By* CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

## Allen Tate: Orphan of the South by Thomas A. Underwood

(Princeton University Press, 447 pp., $35)

## Essays of Four Decades by Allen Tate

(ISI Books, 640 pp., $29.95)

IN 1949, WHEN he turned fifty, Allen Tate published an essay called "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe." In that essay, Tate confessed that as a boy of fourteen he had stared for hours at "the well-known, desperate, and asymmetrical photograph" of Edgar Allan Poe, which he hoped that he "should some day resemble." This wish, as portraits of Tate attest, was granted. But Tate's main point was not to claim some literal kinship lost in the sands of genealogical time somewhere between the vowel shift from "Allan" to "Allen." He argued instead that Poe, the perennial butt of jests and put-downs (such as Eliot's suggestion that Poe might read better in French translation), deserved a place at the table. "For Americans, perhaps for most modern men, he is with us like a dejected cousin: we may 'place' him but we may not exclude him from our board."

This seems to me roughly our present relationship to Allen Tate. Tate is always and everywhere "placed" as a reactionary Southern critic and a minor poet who played first fiddle (Tate actually did play the fiddle) in a band of poet-critics called the Fugitives in the 1920s, the Agrarians in the 1930s, and, augmented with fellow travellers from England and California, the New Critics thereafter. These are the straw men of the academic literary criticism of our day, the dejected cousins drinking bourbon in the corner, placed but no longer read. While there is some truth to the jibes directed their way (just as the strictures against Poe are obvious to bright fourth-graders), the Fugitive–Agrarian–New Critic contingent was in truth much more complicated and interesting than is commonly recognized. Tate's achievement is representative of their work at its best, and it is ripe, like a distant cousin, for rediscovery. His distinctive poems, five or six of which seem permanent achievements; his impressive historical novel, *The Fathers*; his remarkable literary criticism, including some of the best essays ever written on Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe—these will not go away, these should not go away.

LATELY THERE HAS been a steady trickle of publications related to Tate and his associates in what is sometimes called the Southern Literary Renaissance. (Tate, who admired only Poe and the poet Henry Timrod among earlier Southern writers, suggested that "Naissance" was more appropriate.) Tate's *Essays of Four Decades* is back in print. Selected letters of his poet-critic friends Robert Penn Warren and Yvor Winters, in which Tate looms large as a correspondent and a subject, are appearing in stages. And Thomas A. Underwood has just published the first volume of a projected two-volume biography of Tate.

Underwood's first volume brings his tale to 1938, by which time, according to Underwood's therapeutic perspective, Tate had published *The Fathers* and "had resolved many of his feelings of regional and personal orphanhood." Though Underwood does not say so, Tate had also published by 1938 most of the poetry and many of the strongest essays on which his reputation now rests. (Tate died in 1979.) In the second volume of this biography, we can expect detailed accounts of Tate's notorious womanizing, since "most of Tate's philandering occurred after 1938." Tate's conversion to Catholicism in 1950 will presumably occupy a lot of space, along with the unfortunate injection of Jacques Maritain's neo-Thomism into his criticism. Otherwise, apart from Tate's many academic positions and honors, and his retreat from some of his most reactionary positions, it is not clear what one might look forward to in Underwood's second volume.

JUDGING BY THIS first installment, however, Tate has been lucky in his biographer. Underwood's book is rigorously researched and sturdily written. While sympathetic to Tate and admiring of his achievements, Underwood has appropriate qualms about Tate's devotion to so-called Southern ideals. Thus he explores in detail and unflinchingly Tate's commitment until the 1950s to white supremacy ("the negro race is an inferior race," Tate wrote in a notorious letter to Lincoln Kirstein in 1933); and his distaste for socializing with black writers; and his opposition to the "Liberal attack" on Christian values in the Scopes trial; and his flirtation with fascism as a viable blueprint for the South ("we could side with a fascist party").

Underwood's book is a defense of Tate's fundamental seriousness, and of the historical importance of his stances and stands. A Freudian leitmotiv is in place throughout, first sounded in the book's subtitle, "Orphan of the South." Tate was not an orphan—his father lived past the age of seventy—but his own imagination was so openly patriarchal that Underwood's Oedipal scheme seems for the most part internal rather than imposed. A writer who calls his only novel *The Fathers* can be expected to have "issues" about fatherhood.

Only one thing is missing from this biography, but it is a big thing. Allen Tate was a poet, and Underwood has not written the life of a poet. There are hundreds of sentences such as the following: "Before long he was not only on top of his chemistry assignments but had made the best mark in the class on a mathematics examination." But almost never do we learn anything about the circumstances in which Tate wrote a particular poem—presumably a more important event for Tate than getting a good grade in math. Tate's political and religious and psychological convictions are interesting to the degree that they served his poetry. But Underwood uses the poetry, to the extent that he mentions it at all, only to illustrate those convictions. In this regard, he has things backwards. He risks encouraging readers to dismiss the poems on the basis of politics.

CHRISTOPHER BENFEY teaches American literature at Mount Holyoke College, and is the author, most recently, of *Degas in New Orleans* (Knopf).



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ALLEN TATE WAS born in the nineteenth century, but barely, in a small town in Kentucky. His father failed in running a lumber firm, the first of many failures as he drifted around the Midwest in search of work, his growing family in tow. Orley Tate was "brutal and unpredictable," according to Underwood, a "powerfully fisted man" prone to "violence, philandering, and drinking." Allen Tate believed that his father once killed a black waiter with a chair for spilling soup on him. Tate's mother, by contrast, was petite, prim, "tiny-footed." Nellie's fastidious self-image, according to Underwood, was as "a heroine of parthenogenesis in Virginia"; her father had owned eighty-one slaves and 200,000 acres of timber. Tate's mother and father seemed to their bemused son to embody, respectively, the ideals of the Old South and the grim realities of the New South.

Born with an enormous, Poe-like head, Tate was a sickly child, which suited his smothering mother just fine. But his father was wary of any artsy tendencies. The young Tate took violin lessons in Cincinnati, receiving enough encouragement to consider a professional career, but his father "didn't think it went with Kentucky." At Vanderbilt, with Nellie living nearby like Ruskin's hovering mother, Tate took up the equally sissy practice of writing verse, but he balanced it with the manly habits of hard drinking and sex. When Tate ostentatiously slept with one of his girlfriends, a classmate commented: "Nobody had ever heard of anybody doing such a thing at Vanderbilt."

It was at Vanderbilt, where he enrolled in 1918, that Tate made the friendships of a lifetime: with his mentor John Crowe Ransom, recently returned from service in World War I, and with his fellow students Robert Penn Warren and Donald Davidson. Ransom gave Tate a D for his first term and his "slightly bewildering" essays. Tate's poems won a better reception: while still an undergraduate he became a regular contributor and editor for *The Fugitive*, the literary magazine that he and his friends founded at Vanderbilt. What these men shared was a fierce sense of region and an equally strong conviction that the sentimental and obscurantist ways in which that region had been evoked—the "moon and magnolia" mode—were bankrupt and self-defeating. And feminine, one might add. Against *Gone With the Wind*, they advanced a hard-edged but gentlemanly modernism.

Eliot was their hero among the moderns. They were particularly drawn to Eliot's satiric quatrains in such poems as "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" and "Whispers of Immortality": "Webster was much possessed by death/And saw the skull beneath the skin;/And breastless creatures under ground/Leaned backward with a lipless grin." Ransom wrote marvelous poems in this vein, and by 1925 Tate was capable of a sophisticated pastiche such as "Mr. Pope," one of his finest early poems:

> When Alexander Pope strolled in the city
> Strict was the glint of pearl and gold
> sedans.
> Ladies leaned out more out of fear than
> pity
> For Pope's tight back was rather a goat's
> than man's.

Here was an eighteenth-century urbanity, built around wit and opposition (pearl versus gold, fear versus pity, goat versus man), made available to a gentlemanly South. The rest of the poem, a tangled evocation of Pope's burial urn, is not up to this sprightly beginning. Underwood's only comment on this important poem is to see it as a veiled self-portrait (the hunchback takes the place of the large head) in which "Allen attempted to explain how Pope became both a hater of women and a talented satirist." But the poem "explains" nothing of the kind.

Tate's early poems attracted more attention in the hated North than in the South. In 1924 he went to New York for the first time and was (he told Davidson) "greatly thrilled at the mere physique of the city," so unlike the rural South that he loved. He


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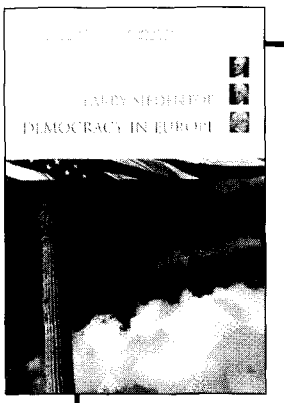

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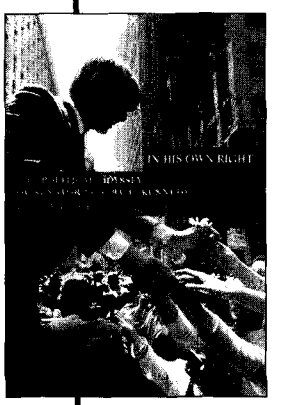

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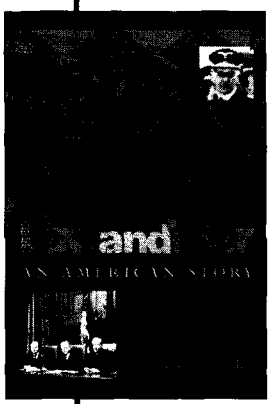

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was particularly impressed by the subway: "the sheer wonder of it is almost atonement for its significance as a phase of the Triumph of the Machine." Tate's host in New York was Hart Crane, with whom he had been corresponding for a couple of years. Crane's attempts to find a poetic language adequate to the modern city clearly influenced Tate's early sonnet "The Subway":

> Dark accurate plunger down the
> successive knell
> Of arch on arch, where ogives burst a red
> Reverberance of hail upon the dead
> Thunder....

Back in the quieter South, Tate moved in with Robert Penn Warren in Guthrie, Kentucky, where he met Carolyn Gordon, a Chattanooga journalist and aspiring novelist. "I pissed in my pants," Tate said. "She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen." They had sex for the first time in a local cemetery. That fall Tate returned to New York and wrote soft-core pornography for the Climax Publishing Company. He and Carolyn had stopped seeing each other in late 1924, but she announced a few months later that she was pregnant with his child. Carolyn joined him in New York, where the novelist Ford Madox Ford hired her as his typist. Tate cut short his affair with the poet Laura Riding, whom he allegedly described as "all right from the neck down."


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CRANE, FORD, GORDON, RIDING: these were all significant writers, and suggest the charged atmosphere in which Tate was writing his early verse. "I think we were drawn together by three things," Tate said of his New York friends. "We were young, we were poor, and we were ambitious. That is, we thought that the older generation was pretty bad, and we were later going to replace them." In chronicling this crucial moment in Tate's life, Underwood makes much of a supposed "division" in Tate:

> As a Southerner in New York he tried to embrace Modernist artistic values without renouncing his affiliation with the Fugitives.... As a result, his career began to turn in on him; he had become a Modernist poet repressing his Southern identity. With two sets of friends, Modernist aesthetes and group-minded Southerners, he was ... "divided against himself."

This sounds good, and it makes for the kind of clarity that biographers need; but it grossly oversimplifies Tate's literary situation and his actual friendships. Among the major influences on Tate's work, neither Crane nor Eliot was a "Modernist aesthete," and Ransom and Warren were not particularly "group-minded." All four poets shared a moral and aesthetic seriousness about finding a usable tradition in English poetry, and all refused to settle for nineteenth-century verse forms and poetic diction.

It is true that Tate and Ransom disagreed about the merits of *The Waste Land*. For Ransom, Eliot's poem was an example of precisely the sort of deracinated "cosmopolitan" mishmash that the Fugitives were out to demolish. For Tate, Eliot's poem demonstrated how symbols might be used to express a certain attitude towards modern rootlessness. Tate's well-known "Ode to the Confederate Dead," published first in 1927, then with revisions ten years later, is, according to Tate's partly tongue-in-cheek essay on the poem, "Narcissus as Narcissus," about the chasm between modern solipsism (a contemporary visitor to a Confederate graveyard) and past heroism (the dead Confederate soldiers). Here is its solemn opening:

> Row after row with strict impunity
> The headstones yield their names to the
> element,
> The wind whirrs without recollection;
> In the riven troughs the splayed leaves
> Pile up, of nature the casual sacrament
> To the seasonal eternity of death....

The poem includes lines that are almost



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comically indebted to Eliot:

> Ambitious November with the humors
> of the year....
> Night is the beginning and the end
> And in between the ends of
> distraction....
> The gray lean spiders come, they come
> and go....

Talking, presumably, of Michelangelo.

Edmund Wilson, at the time an editor at *Vanity Fair*, returned a batch of Tate's early poems with a brief note: "I look forward to something extraordinary from you. But do try to get out of the artistic clutches of T. S. Eliot." Wilson was wrong about these poems. They were extraordinary, taking the language of Eliot and directing it towards Southern landscapes and dilemmas. And just what those dilemmas were became clearer to Tate during the decade after the crash of 1929.

THE AGRARIANS—as they now called themselves—were not alone in believing that the United States in the 1920s had bet too much on industrialization and egregiously neglected farm policy. What Tate, Warren, and others in the Agrarian group wanted to offer was something more than an enlightened economic model tied to agriculture. It was a whole vision of the good life, based on family farms and manual labor and small towns. Ritual, too, was on their agenda, and many of the most beautiful poems that arose from this Agrarian movement, such as Ransom's "Janet Waking" and "Dead Boy" and Tate's "Death of Little Boys," concern themselves with such community-binding and kinship-revealing rituals as funerals and weddings.

The South was the region for which the Agrarians cared, and in their manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, which appeared in 1930 and featured the contributions of "Twelve Southerners," they had an unfortunate tendency to trace the ruinous industrialization of the South to the victory of the Northern invaders in the Civil War. In their view, slavery was no worse than Northern factory conditions, and in certain respects was more protective of human interests. According to Tate, slavery "took the form of benevolent protection" in the South, where "the White man was in every sense responsible for the Black." Northerners, by contrast, "required a different kind of slave" who was granted only "the illusion of freedom." Tate wrote admiring biographies of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis, and began another on Robert E. Lee.

In their more lucid moments, the Agrarians recognized that other sections of the country, such as New England, had experienced similar wrenching adjustments to industrialization and the depopulating of the countryside. An interesting revelation in Jay Parini's recent biography of Robert Frost (who was named for his father's hero, Robert E. Lee) was how close Frost felt to the Agrarian movement, calling himself, according to Warren, a "Yankee Agrarian." Frost's own poems about blighted farms and the virtues of "putting in the seed" arose from some of the same anxieties and the same attachments as the best work of Tate and Ransom. They might have taken as their motto Yeats's lines of 1937 from "The Municipal Gallery Revisited": "All that we did, all that we said or sang/Must come from contact with the soil."

THE AGRARIANS' HOSTILITY to those who, in their view, had no such contact with the soil—capitalists, Marxists, liberals, urban blacks, Jews—led to alliances that they had trouble explaining away. Always eager for national venues in which to air their regional passions, they welcomed a partnership with the reactionary *American Review* and its owner-editor Seward Collins. After a hard-drinking powwow in Alabama in the spring of 1933, Tate reported that he was "astonished" to find "that Collins has the same idea we have on the Jewish nature of liberalism and on the Old Testament character of *Das Kapital*." Collins "has worked himself into a great froth over the Jews," Tate added. "Let us not discourage him." Charmed by Collins's bigotry, they thought that readers of *The American Review* could be trusted to distinguish their "Southern" positions from Collins's increasingly public embrace of European fascism. Privately, though, Tate confided to Davidson that he would "rather be a colony to Eastern capitalism on a fascist basis than a socialized hinterland of government projects."

When Collins made it clear in an interview in early 1936 that he was a fascist pure and simple, an admirer of Hitler and Mussolini who wished to "have a king and nobles, counts, dukes, etc. in America," Tate and his colleagues backpedaled vigorously. "I am so deeply opposed to fascism," Tate wrote to THE NEW REPUBLIC in May 1936, "that I should choose communism if it were the alternative to it. Both are slave-states, but the aim of fascism must be realized by force, while the aim of communism, ideally at least, looks toward order and consent."

The terms of this tepid distinction are revealing (there was no retreat on anti-Semitism), and in any case Tate continued to write for *The American Review*, having persuaded himself that the Agrarians might lead Collins away from "his fas-


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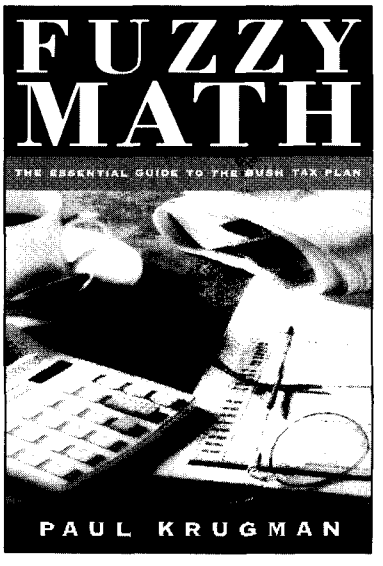


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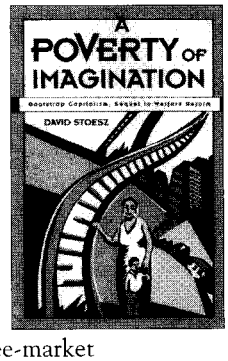


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cism." Yet the steam was running out of the Agrarian movement. By the spring of 1937, aware that he was out of his depth in political matters and that his poems were being scoured for fascist tendencies, Tate wrote to Edmund Wilson that he had "resigned from agrarianism" and its "pseudo-system of practical politics." He concluded that "Ransom, Warren, and myself come a little nearer being artists than the others," and turned his attention to the safer precincts of art.

Underwood gives an excellent narrative of Tate's political shifts and shiftiness during the 1930s. His account is particularly welcome given the thematic arrangement of Tate's *Essays of Four Decades*, and the exclusion from the collection of Tate's most polemical political essays. The consequent scrambling of chronology makes it difficult to trace Tate's progress as a literary essayist. Still, three rough phases seem apparent. Mencken was Tate's model early on, and the brash Philistine-bashing of Tate's early essays marks his first phase, of which a good example is the strange concoction of "Remarks on the Southern Religion" (retitled "Religion and the Old South" in *Essays of Four Decades*) that Tate contributed to *I'll Take My Stand*. Adopting a baroque, abstract, smart-ass mode, Tate showed off his reading: "It is not that the scientific historian refuses to see that Pericles dressed, ate, and loved differently from Cincinnatus; it is rather that the particular instance fades away into a realm of phenomena related as cause and effect." (Tate was saying that the Old South drew from both Greek and Roman traditions.)

Eliot's criticism was an overwhelming influence on Tate's second and most fertile period as an essayist, beginning around 1932. While firming up some of Tate's less attractive prejudices against "free-thinking Jews," Eliot also inspired a more straightforward interpretive model for literary analysis. Not too long ago, Tate's essay "Tension in Poetry" (1938) was fed to graduate students as a central text of the so-called New Criticism, which concentrated attention on "the poem itself," with minimal attention to social context or biographical detail. The essay is not much fun to read now. Tate kicks around some bad poems for a few pages, noting what he calls "failures in denotation" and failures in connotation." But the poems are not as bad as he claims. (Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" clearly offends him more for its political slant on Sacco and Vanzetti than for any crimes against connotation.) A much livelier essay in a formalist mode is "Technique of Fiction," which appeared in 1944, and belongs to a third phase in Tate's criticism—looser, more personal, more confident in stating the simple pleasures of reading. In an admiring discussion of how Henry James sets his scenes in *The Wings of the Dove* and elsewhere, Tate pauses to remark: "What could be better than Milly Theale's last soiree before she becomes too ill to appear again?"

As an essayist, early and late, Tate is strongest when his self-identification with his subject is most complete, as in the fine essay on Emily Dickinson that he published in 1932. Tate steered clear of both biographical speculation and the kind of formalist ingenuity often ascribed to the New Criticism, and adopted what we would now call a cultural approach, arguing that Dickinson was born into a world of small New England towns grounded in agriculture and religion, and found herself in the Gilded Age. "Born into the equilibrium of an old and a new order," hers was, according to Tate, "the perfect literary situation." She had the advantage of an orthodox and highly structured set of theological beliefs and intellectual traditions, namely those of Puritan New England; but since this world was on the wane, she could dwell in it without being imprisoned within it. Tate argued that Dickinson was a heroic voice raised against industrialism. He managed to turn her into a sort of honorary Southerner, "a deep mind writing from a deep culture," untouched by "the rising plutocracy of the East." In Tate's hands, Dickinson's famous poem "Because I could not stop for Death" takes on a Southern coloring: a spectral cavalier taking a lady out for a spin by the Big House.

Tate wrote about Poe in similar terms, interpreting Poe's necrophilia not as a creepy psychological trait but as Poe's protest against a culture devoid of spiritual and aesthetic vitality. For Tate the critic, Dickinson and Poe were poets of "transition," caught in the moment between a world going under—the old agricultural and religious order—and a godless, industrial, money-grubbing world coming into existence. And as a poet himself, Tate thought of his own historical moment the same way. The Southern Literary Renaissance, he decided, had arisen at a "crossing of the ways, not unlike, on an infinitesimal scale, the outburst of poetic genius at the end of the sixteenth century when commercial England had already begun to crush feudal England."

Some such crossing of the ways is audible in Tate's own verse. Tate has two poetic voices. One is wry and tender, in umbilical touch with childhood and the "feudal" South. The other is orotund and sublime, a



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key held up to the sky in hopes of thunder and lightning. The opening of "Mr. Pope" is in the former mode; the "Ode" is in the latter. In Tate's best poems, the two voices are in playful equilibrium. This is nowhere more poignantly apparent than in "The Swimmers":

> Kentucky water, clear springs: a boy
> fleeing
> To water under the dry Kentucky sun,
> His four little friends in tandem with
> him, seeing
>
> Long shadows of grapevine wriggle and
> run
> Over the green swirl; mullein under the
> ear
> Soft as Nausicaa's palm; sullen fun
>
> Savage as childhood's thin harmonious
> tear:
> O fountain, bosom source undying-dead
> Replenish me the spring of love and fear
>
> And give me back the eye that looked and
> fled
> When a thrush idling in the tulip tree
> Unwound the cold dream of the
> copperhead.

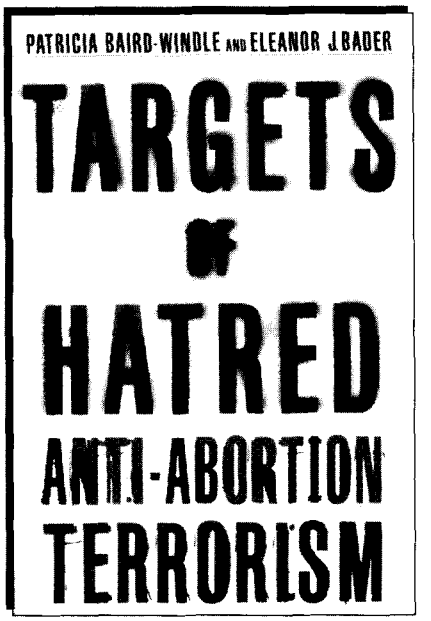
SUCCESSFUL POEMS IN terza rima, the braided rhyme scheme of Dante and of Shelley's "Triumph of Life," are rare in English. Tate's dream vision follows many of the conventions of the genre: the apostrophe to the muse; the sonorous, conjuring language, richest in the sequence of "mullein ... palm ... sullen"; the surveying of border regions of dream and waking, of life and death in the source "undying-dead." And into this sublime landscape Tate introduces "The shrill companions of that odyssey":

> Bill Eaton, Charlie Watson, "Nigger"
> Layne
> The doctor's son, Harry Duesler who
> played
> The flute; and Tate, with water on the
> brain.

Seemingly random matter-of-fact details—the flute player and the hydrocephalic head—undergo a mythical charge in this dreamscape of water music:

> Dog-days: the dusty leaves where rain
> delayed
> Hung low on poison-oak and
> scuppernong,
> And we were following the active shade
>
> Of water, that bells and bickers all night
> long.
> "No more'n a mile," Layne said. All five
> stood still.


"Revelatory and Shocking"*

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Listening, I heard what seemed at first a song.

The song turns out to be the hoofbeats of a posse coming down the hill. After a beautifully modulated Homeric simile—"Then, as sleepwalkers shift from a hard place/In bed, and rising to keep a formal pledge/Descend a ladder into empty space,/We scuttled down the bank below the ledge"—the boys awaken to the stark geometry of a lynching. A stranger on horseback and the sheriff drag the body back to town.

My breath crackled the dead air like a shotgun
As, sheriff and the stranger disappearing,
The faceless head lay still. I could not run

Or walk, but stood. Alone in the public clearing
This private thing was owned by all the town,
Though never claimed by us within my hearing.

Though "The Swimmers," which was published in 1953, rightfully belongs in the sequel to this first volume of the biography, Underwood gives some attention to the "race theme" in the poem, and adduces it towards the end of his book as evidence for Tate's adoption during the 1950s of more progressive views on race. "I wasn't born with virtue in these matters," Tate wrote. "I have had to acquire it." But "The Swimmers" is not a good poem simply because of its progressive views on race. And anything obvious that it has to say about Southern guilt is less interesting than what it has to say about shame and childhood secrets, and how a sense of community is sometimes built, like an oyster with a painful grain of sand, around such secrets.

The power of the poem derives from the life of its language, from Tate's sure grip on oneiric evocation, narrative drive, and telling detail. It was Tate's unerring skill in knowing that "scuppernong" and "Harry Duesler who played the flute" belonged there that makes this poem a significant portent of what came to be known, a decade later, as "confessional poetry." As a teenager Robert Lowell pitched his tent on Tate's lawn in Tennessee in 1937, and his verse, with its trust in the public resonance of autobiographical detail, remained tethered to Tate's. What finer tribute to Tate's "Ode" could there be than Lowell's Yankee counterpoint, "For the Union Dead"?

Underwood wants us to believe that Tate was a better novelist than poet. He claims that *The Fathers* is "the most important work of [Tate's] life" and "the crowning achievement of his career"; but such judgments are more indicative of Underwood's distaste for poetry than of the peculiar virtues of Tate's novel. Tate wrote the book during the 1930s, in fits and starts. When he finally finished it, he had to splice together its sometimes disparate writing. It is a Civil War novel, more centrally concerned with divisions among a couple of Southern families—loosely based on Tate's ancestors, in and around Washington, D.C.—than with Yankees and Rebels. The Buchans are an old Virginia family rooted in the soil. The Poseys of Georgetown are urban, Catholic, mercantile. Yet Tate does not settle for a simple opposition between a noble Old South of the soil and a crass New South of money. The patriarch of the Buchans wants to preserve the Union, and a Posey is the hero of the novel. The novel is told from the perspective of Lacy Buchan, looking back at events that occurred many decades earlier, and there is nobody that Lacy admires more than the wheeler-dealer George Posey.

Among the vivid tableaux that make up the book, the opening scene, when Lacy is a youngster of fifteen at his mother's funeral, is particularly poignant. Here is the old Agrarian subject of the kith and kin gathered around a community knitting ritual:

> It was only today as I was walking down Fayette Street towards the river that I got a whiff of salt fish, and I remembered the day I stood at Pleasant Hill, under the dogwood tree. It was late April and the blossoms shot into the air like spray. My mother was dead. Crowds of the connection had arrived the night before; and I had come, a boy of fifteen, after breakfast, out into the yard. Under the tree I could still taste the salt of the roe herring that Aunt Myra Parrish had kept serving to the kin and friends from Washington and Alexandria.

It is bracing to find, in the latest volume of Robert Penn Warren's letters, that he judged this to be "a fairly stereotyped way of opening: the business of the smell of herring seems to be a kind of dodge for getting into the story." He urged Tate to cut the passage.

*The Fathers* is the story of a man who sells his own mulatto half-brother to buy a prize mare, then kills his brother-in-law to avenge the death of that same half-brother. Miscegenation and rape suggest Faulkner's influence, but it is Fitzgerald and Gatsby who, surprisingly, preside here. George Posey is guilty of greater transgressions than Gatsby, but he, too, is a "stranger" adrift who shows in the end more dignity and honor than the rooted Buchan family into which he marries. The Buchans could be the Buchanans, blue blood and attitude, but it is Posey/Gatsby who carries the day. (Tate sets a scene in Gadsby's Tavern, a broad hint of what he is up to.) The novel is consistently interesting and entertaining to read—there is a sustained evocation of Poe and a cameo by Henry Adams, "a great snob even then"; and it is certainly as good a plantation novel as Willa Cather's contemporaneous *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. But if *The Fathers* is Tate's "crowning achievement," Tate's reputation is in trouble.

Underwood's book ends on a bathetic note. He tells how happy Tate was when he had finished *The Fathers*, and how it suddenly seemed to dawn on him that he had a daughter of his own. He quotes a letter of Tate's: "I finished the novel the night of the 21st: the last incident was on July 21st 1861. Nancy became a woman on the 21st. The book will appear on Sept. 23rd, her birthday. The moon seems to favor it." Underwood concludes: "Looking forward rather than backward, Allen Tate was no longer an orphan but a father." In other words, the completion of *The Fathers* "brought a symbolic end" to Tate's own childhood, allowing him to acknowledge his daughter. It seems more likely that, like other busy fathers, Tate simply did not make time for his daughter—until, that is, he finished his time-consuming novel and Nancy was old enough to be amusing.

I would rather leave Tate in the 1930s on another, less triumphal note, struck in a short poem to Warren called "Brief Message":

This, Warren, is our trouble now:
Not even fools could disavow
Three centuries of piety
Grown bare as a cottonwood tree
(A timber seldom drawn and sawn
And chiefly used to hang men on),
So face with calm that heritage
And earn contempt before the age.

There is more than a hint, in that hammering plain style, of Raleigh and Yeats, but the cottonwood tree—the wayward rhythm in the line in which it is mentioned, and the specialized parenthetical knowledge about its uses—is all Tate's. A young man looks lucidly at the South during the Depression: no religion, no money, a burden of guilt, a bareness of culture, hostility all around. Under the circumstances, Tate and his friends, those dejected cousins, did pretty well. ■



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# Reasons of State, States of Reason

*By* RICHARD WOLIN

## Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography by Christoph Frei

(Louisiana State University Press, 246 pp., $49.95)

I.

HANS JOACHIM Morgenthau was an American success story with an inauspicious beginning. A Jewish academic hounded out of Europe, he arrived in the United States in 1937, unknown and penniless. His only professional contact was Richard Gottheil, a professor of Jewish history at Columbia University, whom he had met in Paris several years earlier. Upon his arrival in New York, Morgenthau immediately inquired about Gottheil's whereabouts. He learned that the professor had died that spring.

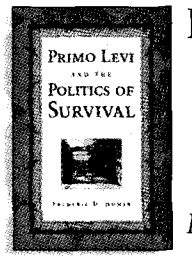
In Europe, Morgenthau had survived as an itinerant scholar, teaching international politics and law at a negligible wage in Geneva and Madrid. In the United States, he picked up where he had left off on the Continent, with a series of underpaid, demanding jobs. He began his American career at Brooklyn College, where he earned $3.50 per hour and spent much of his time fending off Communist hecklers. In 1939 he moved to the University of Kansas City, where he taught eighteen hours a semester under a corrupt administration that soon got the university placed on a blacklist by the American Association of University Professors. A former water closet served as his office.

Morgenthau was perturbed to discover that the anti-Semitism that he had endured in Europe existed also in the New World. Several times he was denied teaching positions with the unassailable declaration that "we have never had a Jewish member on the faculty." "It is surprising now," Morgenthau observed years later. "You don't remember this, but before the war there was very strong anti-Jewish prejudice which was accepted as a matter of course." Still, Morgenthau did not confuse the flaws of America with the horrors of Europe. His life and his career had run aground in Europe during the late 1930s, and he was forever grateful for the second chance that his adopted land gave him. As he remarked in an interview in 1968: "When I came here as a virtual unknown ... I had no money, no connections, no pull whatsoever. But I did have the opportunity to show what I could do and by showing it, was able to advance. It is this uniqueness which from the very beginning has been the distinctive characteristic of American society."

Morgenthau's deliverance from the vicissitudes of academic provincialism came in 1943, when he was offered a temporary position at the University of Chicago. To its credit, the university soon realized the exceptional nature of Morgenthau's talents and gave him a permanent post. Nor did it take long for the returns on this investment to accrue. In 1946, Morgenthau's first book, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, appeared. Two years later Morgenthau, now forty-four, published *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, the work that would establish his reputation. The book proved a runaway success. It went through six editions and was translated into nine languages. It single-handedly established the modern field of international relations, and it served as the most sophisticated modern articulation of the worldview known as "realism." In 1950, two years after the publication of *Politics Among Nations*, some two hundred articles about Morgenthau's work appeared.

Between 1946 and 1951, Morgenthau published six books (three of which were edited volumes) and thirty-four articles. Practically overnight, he went from being a relatively unknown political theorist

RICHARD WOLIN is distinguished professor of history and comparative literature at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. His new book, *Heidegger's Children*, will be published by Princeton University Press this fall.




Primo Levi and the Politics of Survival

*Frederic D. Homer*

In the course of his writings, Levi asked and answered his most haunting question: can someone be brutalized by a terrifying experience and, upon return to "ordinary life," recover from the physical and moral destruction he has suffered? Levi used this question to develop a philosophy positing that although man is no match for life, he can become better prepared to contend with the tragedies in life. Homer also explores the impact of Levi's death on the way in which his work and theories have been perceived. While several critics discount Levi's work because of the nature of his death, Homer argues that his death is consistent with his philosophy.

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to an influential thinker often described as "world-renowned." During the 1960s, Morgenthau achieved public prominence as a vociferous critic of American foreign policy—above all, of the expanding debacle in Vietnam. A poll taken in 1972 listing America's seventy most influential intellectuals ranked him twenty-first. In the 1980s, commentators continued to cite *Politics Among Nations* as the most significant textbook in international relations, and to cite Morgenthau as the leading scholar in the field. He died in 1980.

MORGENTHAU WAS ONE of the twentieth century's most forceful exponents of "political realism," the view that defines international politics as a quasi-Darwinian struggle for power. As a result of its vision of state relations as an anarchical "war of all against all," political realism systematically discounts the role of moral or ideal considerations in foreign policy. It is cynicism for statesmen. (Which is not to say that realists are cynics in all the spheres of their lives.)

According to political realists, moral considerations should be viewed with suspicion for two reasons. States that purvey moral claims usually do so only in order to justify or to conceal political self-interest. (During the 1920s, the German jurist Carl Schmitt sought to drive home this point with the harsh epigram "he who says 'rights of man' lies.") Moreover, those starry-eyed states inclined to perceive international relations in moral terms frequently underestimate the nefarious machinations of their competitors on the world political stage. By neglecting such considerations, they risk being outmaneuvered and they invite political catastrophe. One of the central tenets of political realism is a predatory view of human nature, epitomized in the ancient slogan *homo homini lupus*, man is a wolf to man. It finds its culmination in the early modern doctrine of *raison d'état*, or "reason of state."

Political realism possesses an old and illustrious intellectual pedigree. In his attempt to discern the ultimate causes of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides offered an anthropological explanation that is often considered the *fons et origo* of the realist standpoint: "The cause of all these evils was love of power due to ambition and greed.... The object of interest for the nation in its historical development is *dynamis*, power, and this means dominion over others." In one of the book's better-known episodes, the ill-fated Melians, besieged by the mighty Athenian fleet, appeal to the sense of justice of their would-be conquerors. The Athenians respond with brutal frankness: "the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel ... the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept." In the annals of political history, unsurprisingly, the Melian dialogue has been treated as the supreme object lesson in the amoralist's approach to foreign affairs.

In the early modern period, the primary exponents of political realism were Machiavelli and Hobbes. The Florentine diplomat famously condemned any attempt to reconcile reasons of state with the otherworldly ends of the *civitas dei*, which he considered political suicide. In *The Prince* and in *The Discourses*, he implored rulers to subordinate ethical claims to the imperatives of political self-preservation: "In the actions of men, and especially princes from which there is no appeal, the end justifies the means. Let the prince, therefore, aim at conquering and maintaining the state, and the means will always be judged honorable and praised by everyone." Machiavelli's political credo was amoral, not immoral. He argued that if the state were allowed to perish, all other temporal values would be ruined along with it. In the last analysis, he never justified the abrogation of ethical concerns as an end in itself, but only in light of the greater ends of *raison d'état*. Yet his view of human nature—"men are ungrateful, inconstant, deceitful ... greedy and avaricious"—was hardly more sanguine than the view of Thucydides.

For Hobbes, relations among states incarnated the "war of all against all" that obtains in the state of nature. The Leviathan, or the sovereign, could put an end to this condition of unbridled anarchy within his own kingdom. But relations between states were another matter. In the international arena, antagonisms remained intractable, without hope of positive resolution. As Hobbes noted soberly in *Leviathan*, "where there is no common Power, there is no Law: where no Law, no Injustice." The expectation that considerations of justice or considerations of right would apply to international affairs was sheer fantasy. Writing in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War, Hobbes saw no alternative to defining international politics as an irredeemable state of war. In this sphere, he observed, "the notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place."

Morgenthau liberally outfitted *Politics Among Nations* with citations from his distinguished predecessors—Augustine, John of Salisbury, Tolstoy, even the Dead Sea Scrolls—in order to buttress his hard-boiled thesis about the inherent untrustworthiness of humankind. But his citations were more than intellectual window-dressing. Morgenthau was convinced that in order to establish the "objective laws" of interstate behavior, and thereby to produce a political treatise of lasting value, he needed to take into account the moral and anthropological constants of human nature. For Morgenthau, realism was not only a policy, it was also a philosophy. Since its principles had not altered since the time of Thucydides, ancient precedents were as valuable as modern ones.

Having clarified his premises, Morgenthau went on to provide a rudimentary definition of international politics as "interest defined in terms of power." He made it clear that his theory, far from being an academic exercise, possessed prognosticative value. "We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out," he wrote. "That assumption allows us to retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman—past, present, or future—has taken or will take on the political scene." He conceived of *Politics Among Nations* as a manual for statesmen, rather along the lines of *The Prince*.

Morgenthau's "great statesman" approach to international relations ("We look over the [statesman's] shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversation with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts") was studiously abstracted from domestic considerations such as elections, public opinion, or national economy. In an age of democratic legitimacy, this turned out to be a major weakness of his analysis. Yet his emphases and his elisions were hardly a mere oversight. In keeping with the elitist orientation of *raison d'état* thinking, Morgenthau held political democracy in low esteem. Bluntly put, it was a drag on the autonomy of statesmanship. Domestic and democratic influences on foreign policy were among the "irrational elements" that Morgenthau's approach to foreign relations sought to keep at bay. As he wrote in *Politics Among Nations*, "the need to muster popular emotions to the support of foreign policy cannot fail to impair the rationality of foreign policy itself."

Morgenthau's erudite references concealed realism's modern source: the nineteenth-century doctrine of *Staatsräson*, whose great hero was Germany's "blood and iron" chancellor Bismarck. *Staatsräson* was the German equivalent of *raison d'état*, the bellicose approach to foreign policy that Bismarck had put to sanguinary use during the wars of 1864 (with Denmark), 1866 (with Austria), and 1870–1871 (with France), culminating in unification under Prussian hegemony. As a German émigré writing in the aftermath of Nazism's collapse, Morgenthau could hardly have couched his claims explicitly



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in the Bismarckian idiom; but there is no mistaking the fact that his political orientation remained profoundly indebted to the statist outlook of German historicists—Ranke, Treitschke, and Meinecke—whose celebrated watchword, *der Primat der Aussenpolitik*, "the primacy of foreign policy," he embraced in fact and in spirit.

In the late 1920s, Morgenthau had intended to write a major study of Machiavelli, but he abandoned this plan upon encountering Meinecke's extraordinary work *The Doctrine of Reason of State and Its Place in Modern History*, which appeared in 1924. Astonishingly, one of the few scholars to have called attention to the markedly Teutonic aspects of Morgenthau's thought was the historian Golo Mann, who correctly identified Morgenthau's standpoint as "distinctly German" in its origins.

## II.

WHEN MORGENTHAU ARRIVED in the United States during the late 1930s, he was appalled by the reigning mood of scientific utopianism, which he interpreted as a corollary of the legendary naïveté of America. In the social sciences, the commonplace scholarly assumption seemed to be that "man" was a rational animal, and that all human problems were solvable rationally, that is, by means of the collection and the analysis of data, and by means of social engineering. Morgenthau perceived a comparable lack of worldliness in American foreign policy, which he believed had oscillated between the witless extremes of isolationism and Wilsonian internationalism. From the standpoint of America's status as an incipient world power, he considered both approaches to be potentially fatal. As a European who had witnessed the injustices of power politics in the style of Machiavelli and Hobbes—a Falange mortar shell had scored a direct hit on his apartment in Madrid in 1936 (he was vacationing in Italy at the time)—Morgenthau took it upon himself to act as *Praeceptor Americae*, instructing his adoptive homeland in the devious wiles of interstate relations. His job was to wise America up.

Morgenthau confronted the delusions of social scientific utopianism in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*. Although *Power Among Nations* was the book to which he owed his fame, the former work—his first to appear in English—remained a special source of pride. The main flaw of scientism, argued Morgenthau, was that it attempted to foist rational solutions on creatures whose fundamental motivations were of an entirely different order: egotistical, spiteful, base. In his cheerless view, man was an *animus dominandi*, driven and propelled by an insatiable "lust for power [that] would be satisfied only if the last man became the object of his domination." Morgenthau concluded that "there is no escape from the evil of power ... [and so] political ethics is indeed the ethics of doing evil."

By naïvely seeking to transpose the methods of the natural sciences onto the recalcitrant realities of human existence, the social sciences had committed a category mistake whose deleterious effects, from a human standpoint, were far-reaching. Indeed, this misplaced faith in science and reason had precipitated a civilizational crisis of unprecedented dimensions. Its consequences became manifest during the 1930s, as the liberal democracies—with their Panglossian trust in reason, progress, and "perpetual peace"—stood naked and helpless in the face of the fascist menace. In Morgenthau's eyes, the Munich pact of 1938, far from being an isolated error in judgment, signified the bankruptcy of Western liberalism in all its aspects: moral, intellectual, political. "The philosophy of rationalism," he asserted fiercely in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*,

> has misunderstood the nature of man, the nature of the social world, and the nature of reason itself.... The period between the two world wars, which saw its triumph in theory and in practice,


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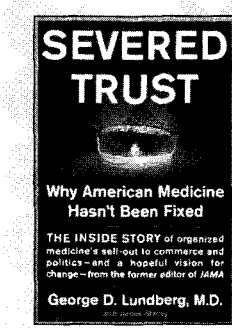
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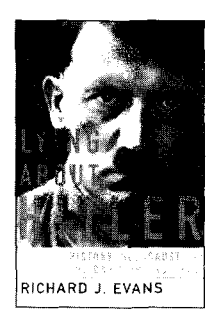


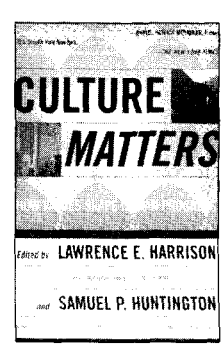


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> witnessed also its intellectual, moral, and political bankruptcy.... The fact that Western civilization could completely misunderstand the intellectual, moral, and political challenge of fascism and be brought to the brink of disaster by those very forces it had defeated on the battlefield but twenty years before should raise doubts in the soundness of its philosophy, morality, and statecraft.

When pressed to defend his excessively pessimistic view of human nature, on which so much of his political thought depended, Morgenthau repaired—naïvely, and rather unscientifically—to the theological doctrine of original sin. This was the classical fallback of political conservatism. As he noted in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*: "the sinfulness of man is conceived ... not as an accidental disturbance of the order of the world sure to be overcome by a gradual development toward the good but as an inescapable necessity ... which only an act of grace or salvation in another world is able to overcome." Since Morgenthau considered the omnipresence of evil as an unalterable fact of the world, he saw no other alternative than to define politics as "the ethics of doing evil."

In the postwar world, the totalitarian threat had shifted from right to left, from fascism to communism; and Morgenthau felt confirmed in his anthropological pessimism. He never put any intellectual pressure upon his explanation from sin. But surely the notion that politics should rest on a doctrine of original sin is no more sophisticated and no more warranted than the Enlightenment shibboleths about human perfectibility. Both views represent threadbare generalizations formulated with particular political and ideological ends in view. It has always been one of realism's central claims that unlike other political doctrines—fascism, communism, liberalism—it is fundamentally unideological. Realism likes to congratulate itself on this *Wertfreiheit*. Yet it flatters itself too much. This contention served only to mask realism's own biases, which were distinctly conservative and often authoritarian. Perhaps the best rejoinder to Morgenthau's construction of politics was offered by George Lichtheim: "To Mr. Morgenthau's rhetorical question 'why is it that all men lust for power?' the answer is 'some don't.'"

### III.

THE GREAT SERVICE of Christoph Frei's fine study of Morgenthau's development—whose focus, as Frei aptly puts it, is on *Werden* rather than *Sein*—is that it exposes, in ways that are both edifying and unexpected, the German dimension of Morgenthau's realism. Frei demonstrates convincingly that the intellectual formation of this "American thinker" was decisively shaped by his biographical and scholarly experiences as a youth in Weimar Germany. (Serendipitously for the biographer, Morgenthau carefully preserved his every scrap of paper since high school. His papers, now housed at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, include two hundred twelve boxes of work-related documents alone.)

Morgenthau grew up in the southern German town of Coburg. The town is now a part of Bavaria, but when Morgenthau came of age it was an independent duchy, rife with Biedermeier provincialism and an anti-Semitism that had intensified significantly in the aftermath of Germany's military defeat. During the 1920s, Coburg proved especially fertile ground for right-wing extremism. In 1922, gravestones in the local Jewish cemetery were desecrated. Ten years later, it became the first German city to bestow honorary citizenship on Adolf Hitler.

The decisive event of Morgenthau's youth occurred when he was seventeen. It was the time-honored custom for the top-ranked student at the local *Gymnasium* to give a public speech in honor of the duke on the anniversary of the town's founding. Although no Jew had been previously selected for the honor—in fact, young Morgenthau was the only Jew enrolled at the elite institution—there was no getting around the fact that he merited it, even if he was still a year away from graduation. The morning of the celebration, Morgenthau's fellow Coburgers distributed anti-Semitic leaflets containing a nasty play on his Jewish-sounding name and urging a boycott. "This was probably the worst day of my life," he remarked in retrospect. "Nobody would walk alongside me. People shouted at me and spat at me.... People shook their fists at me and shouted imprecations and anti-Semitic insults. It was terrible, absolutely terrible." During Morgenthau's speech, the duke and his fellow notables made a show of holding their noses in disgust, as a photograph attests.

Clearly these youthful experiences—an eerie harbinger of *Kristallnacht* and other Nazi atrocities—influenced Morgenthau's later belief in the intractability of political evil. The lesson that he drew from these events was that lawless brutality could only be countered by superior force. When confronted with unlimited evil, law reveals its relative impotence. As he wrote in a premonitory school composition around the same period, "When I see how little the enemy respects the law, how he declares me to be without the protection of law, I easily might be persuaded that in dealing with such an enemy I could likewise dispense with justice and law."

STILL, THE UNENDING train of humiliations Morgenthau endured as a youth seems also to have hardened his resolve to combat injustice. In a remarkable senior essay written in 1923, he observed:

> I am innocent of the things that are blamed on the Jews. I consider the hostile actions evoked by these accusations, such as social rejection ... or brutal insults, as a crying injustice and a dishonoring humiliation.... Since I am not able to play the role of the suffering martyr, and since I am not ... sufficiently callous and indifferent to bear injustice and humiliation in silence, there remains for me only the struggle against the representatives of this movement.

At the conclusion of this youthful essay, Morgenthau prophesied his own intellectual future. He makes it clear that one of the ways in which he will respond to persecution and pain will be through a single-minded devotion to intellectual success—the pursuit of a glorious scholarly career:

> To be able to work in the service of a great idea, on behalf of an important goal; to be able to commit every nerve, every muscle, and every drop of sweat to a work, to a great task; to grow with the work, to become greater oneself in the struggle with one's betters—and then to be able to say at the end: I die, but there remains something that is more important than my life and will last longer than my body: my work: That is my hope, which is worthy of tremendous efforts, that is my goal, for which it is worth living and, if need be, dying.

At university Morgenthau was primarily interested in philosophy and literature, but his father forbade such an "impractical" course of study. Morgenthau chose law instead, though his youthful intellectual passions never disappeared entirely. At the University of Munich, Morgenthau enthusiastically attended the historian Hermann Oncken's lectures on Bismarck's foreign policy and military policy. He later recalled that "the latter, especially, made a profound impression on me. For the first time, I felt the impact of a coherent system of thought, a distillation of Bismarck's *Realpolitik*, that appeared to support my isolated and impressionistic judgments on contemporary issues of foreign policy."

The other university experience that exerted a lasting influence on Morgenthau



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was Karl Rotthenbücher's seminar on the political thought of Max Weber. Although he was in domestic questions a liberal, Weber's musings on foreign policy revealed him to be an unambiguous exponent of *Machtpolitik*, a worthy heir to the geopolitical doctrines of Ranke, Treitschke, and Nietzsche. In his celebrated essay "Politics as a Vocation," Weber jettisoned considerations of "right" and "legitimacy" and defined politics in the narrow, power-political terms of *Staatsräson*: "Politics means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power either among states or among groups within a state.... When a question is said to be a 'political' question ... what is always meant is that interests in the distribution, maintenance, or transfer of power are decisive for answering the questions and determining the decisions." Morgenthau later noted that "Weber's political thought possessed all the intellectual and moral qualities I had looked for in vain in the contemporary literature inside and outside the universities."

Upon completing his law degree, Morgenthau moved to Frankfurt, where he began work on a dissertation on international law and politics, and clerked for the eminent Social Democratic scholar Hugo Sinzheimer, who had co-authored the Weimar constitution. In Frankfurt, Morgenthau also came into contact with the Marxists of the Frankfurt School, who resided in the so-called "Red Castle" of the Institute for Social Research. As he avowed in an early attempt at autobiography, published in 1977 as "Fragment of an Intellectual Autobiography": "An intellectual youth tired of the irrelevancies, humbug, and nonsense served up by the academic orthodoxies and repelled by the barbarities of Nazism entered with hope the new world of social relationships that Marxist analysis was opening up." Still, while recognizing the undeniable analytical value of certain Marxist concepts, Morgenthau was ultimately disillusioned.

> While I, as most social scientists, learned a great deal from Marx, I could not abide that particular type of Marxist who considers Marxism to be a closed intellectual system, containing ready-made answers to all possible questions.... I was particularly struck and repelled by the contrast between the real political situation in Germany and the futile hair-splitting in which the ordinary members of the Institute engaged. The Nazi enemy was standing at the gate ... and these intelligent and learned people, the natural enemies and designated victims of Nazism, found nothing better to do than search for the true meaning of one statement by Marx as over against another.

It was also during this period that Morgenthau, on a trip to Berlin, encountered the controversial Carl Schmitt. Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* had appeared in 1927. Its definition of politics in terms of the capacity to distinguish between "friend" and "enemy" sent shockwaves through the relatively staid German intellectual and legal establishment. Morgenthau conceived of his doctoral dissertation, "The International Judicial Function: Its Nature and Limits," as a response to Schmitt.

The political philosopher in Berlin sent the younger scholar an appreciative note regarding his dissertation. But during their brief encounter Schmitt behaved in such an appallingly self-serving manner that Morgenthau emerged thinking that "now I have met the most evil man alive." In the light of Schmitt's servile actions on behalf of the Nazis a few years later—among other offenses, he justified the infamous "Night of the Long Knives" with a fawning article called "The Führer Protects the Law"—Morgenthau's estimation may not have been far off.

Working for Sinzheimer afforded Morgenthau extensive contact with the Weimar legal system. The Weimar judiciary was notorious for its anti-democratic bias, and the experience seems to have further soured him on the idea of law as an effective bulwark against political extremism. Morgenthau was struck by the sheer arbitrariness of legal outcomes. One case that came before Sinzheimer involved a dentist falsely accused of sexual misconduct. It was due only to the eleventh-hour testimony of a psychiatric expert witness that the defendant was acquitted. In the early 1930s, Morgenthau participated in a celebrated political case known as the "Knöss affair," involving a Social Democratic housing administrator who had been convicted on trumped-up corruption charges. Twice Morgenthau helped win appeals for a new trial. Then the Nazis came to power and, in Morgenthau's words, "took care of [the defendant] without concern for the law."

Frei's major discovery concerns Morgenthau's youthful fascination with Nietzsche, whom the budding scholar described in his diary in 1928 as "the god of my youth." To be sure, an encounter with Nietzsche was a mandatory rite of passage for German youth during this period, and German-Jewish youth not least. But Frei's revelations are nonetheless provocative, since Morgenthau seems to have effaced all traces of Nietzsche's influence from his mature work. He first came upon Nietzsche as a university student, and for a time the discovery became an obsession. "It is easy to see why religions prescribe praying morning, noon and night, when I note the effect on me of reading one of Nietzsche's sentences," he comments upon reading the philosopher's *Untimely Meditations* in 1926. "And is it not the equivalent of religion for modern man? We should impose on ourselves the duty to read one of Nietzsche's essays every day to live better lives, to achieve greater things." Morgenthau pledged that he would read the philosopher's collected works in their entirety. This he did, and it took him forty months.

Ultimately, Frei is not content to number Nietzsche as merely one among Morgenthau's many early influences. He hazards the more sweeping and less plausible claim that Nietzsche was the greatest youthful influence of all. As Frei would have it, Morgenthau's political realism—his conception of the intrinsically predatory nature of human political behavior—is of exclusively Nietzschean provenance. It was Nietzsche, after all, who had dramatically proclaimed the "death of God" and declared "nihilism" an inescapable contemporary fate. It was Nietzsche who ruthlessly debunked the modern platitudes about the rights of man and democratic egalitarianism. What thinker had, with greater honesty and foresight, captured the dilemmas of the human condition in an age of radical "disenchantment"? Did not Nietzsche's understanding of life as a "will to power" represent a more honest appraisal of reality than the threadbare progressivism so dear to champions of Western "civilization"? And these were precisely the terms in which the young Morgenthau venerated the self-described iconoclast and "antichrist." As he remarked in an essay in 1930 called "Suicide with a Clear Conscience," "Nietzsche, the seer, whose eyes penetrate to the bottom, the abyss of the human soul."

But Frei claims too much. In Morgenthau's diary entry of May 4, 1928, following his marathon immersion in Nietzsche's work, he expressed the following reservations about his erstwhile idol: "We must never be hasty in our judgments. Half a year ago, I would certainly have dedicated my first book to Nietzsche.... Today it is, at least, problematic for me whether he really was one of the greatest minds of all times." Those are not the words of an acolyte. In a carefully maintained list of books read that Morgenthau completed in 1930, Nietzsche appears as merely one among several influences. As one might expect, Machiavelli, Schopenhauer, Weber, and Schmitt also figure



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prominently. Moreover, Morgenthau's exaggerated identification with Nietzsche seems to have been to a large extent biographically determined. As an alienated youth in an alienating Germany, Morgenthau identified profoundly with Nietzsche's status as a misunderstood loner: he felt that he had found a fellow-sufferer who was also a kindred spirit. Young people still kindle to Nietzsche in this way.

And there is another aspect of Morgenthau's fascination with Nietzsche that Frei seems to have overlooked. It is the most delicate aspect of all, the Jewish aspect. In his diary in 1927, Morgenthau reflects on the persecution that he had experienced: "There is no way out, just continuous suffering." By allying himself with Nietzsche's doctrines, there is a sense in which this young German Jew was identifying with the oppressor. As a student, Morgenthau was barred from Aryans-only dueling fraternities, the apex of assimilation, but he repeatedly tried to gain admission to them (before finally settling for a Jewish equivalent). This indicates a craving for social acceptance.

When Morgenthau was a lecturer at the University of Geneva during the early 1930s, anti-Semitic students boycotted his classes. Yet his diaries from the 1920s and the 1930s, liberally cited by Frei, are replete with muted expressions of Jewish anxiety. Upon returning from the theater during the late 1920s, he observes: "There are too many Jews on the stage." A few years later, he describes a new acquaintance this way: "He is an unusually appealing person, a truly decent fellow. In our country, there are hardly any Jews like him."

Remarks of this nature, riddled with social ambivalence, were commonplace among assimilated Central European Jews during the 1920s. It was the run-of-the-mill Jews who were the problem, not the *Ausnahme-Juden*—the exceptional Jews—such as Morgenthau. In fashioning his private alliance with Nietzsche, Morgenthau identified himself with aristocratic values, with the spiritual advantages of the *Übermensch*, in opposition to the "all too human" mass man who was driving civilization into the abyss. No wonder that, in his autobiographical fragment, Morgenthau avows that during the 1920s his political sympathies lay with Germany's "Young Conservatives"—that is, with spiritual reactionaries such as Nietzsche, Spengler, and Schmitt.

## Trick of the Night

*—after Verlaine*

Moonrise. Rainfall. A far-off satellite
broods above the skyscrapers like a threat
veiled from the eye by heaped but ragged cloud.
Here below, the sleepless, their faces dead,
tongues tied, avoid each other like the plague,
as if to greet a stranger were to beg
or let a frantic dog snap at your fingers.
Starcrammed, firepetalled bouquets burst like hungers
down in the subway: lilac, marigold
relieve the gloom while waiting to be sold.
At last, three boys, as thin as prisoners,
wearily mount the narrow, concrete stairs,
driven forth by the uproar of their train
to brave the calm derision of the rain.

**Chris Yu**

### IV.

When *Politics Among Nations*, proclaiming international politics a "ubiquitous struggle for power," was published in 1948, the moment could not have been more propitious. During the 1930s, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had made a travesty of internationalism by systematically flaunting peace treaties and multilateral accords; and Lloyd George had mocked the hypocrisy of Wilsonianism, observing that "the Americans appeared to assume responsibility for the sole guardianship of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount; yet when it came to a practical question of ... responsibility, they absolutely refused to accept it." During the war, though, the spirit of Wilsonian internationalism remained strong among the American political elite. Roosevelt claimed that the war was being fought for the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter. In 1943, upon returning from the Moscow conference, Secretary of State Cordell Hull optimistically declared that "there will no longer be need for spheres of influence, for alliances, for balance of power, or for any other of the special arrangements through which, in the unhappy past, the nations strove to safeguard their security or promote their interests."

By 1948, however, the onset of the cold war had dashed hopes for a continued Soviet-American alliance. *Politics Among Nations* appeared a year after George Kennan's anonymous *Foreign Affairs* article recommending a strategy of "containment," and Morgenthau's book provided diplomats, statesmen, and policymakers with a sophisticated arsenal of concepts to justify the new realities of international confrontation. The irony of all this, as Morgenthau readily admitted, was that geopolitical developments rendered the theory of international relations advanced in *Politics Among Nations* obsolete almost immediately after the book's publication, since the "balance of power" approach that he recommended presupposed the existence of the European multistate system combined with American nuclear superiority. When the Soviets successfully exploded an atomic bomb in 1949, the central assumptions of Morgenthau's theory were exploded with it: suddenly the United States was faced with a bilateral conflict under conditions of (relative) nuclear parity.

Balance-of-power doctrines first arose in the aftermath of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. They presupposed a multiplicity of sovereign states that had a mutual interest in preventing domination by any single nation. Decision-making was in the hands of a relatively small (and often related) group of monarchs and ministers who viewed foreign policy in terms of relatively limited and well-defined goals. But realist thinkers tended to idealize the Westphalian system. They downplayed the frequency and the extent of pointless wars of dynastic succession, and they shamelessly ignored the repressive domestic policies of the dominant states.

Morgenthau realized that the advent of strategic nuclear weapons rendered the classic assumptions of balance-of-power doctrines anachronistic. Moreover, in the modern world, powerful suprapolitical forces—technological, scientific, and economic—made the axioms of traditional *raison d'état* obsolete. The precepts of political realism needed to be revised accordingly. Convinced that a mutual escalation of nuclear armaments was inherently destabilizing—the prospect of mutual annihilation, he claimed, precluded their "rational" employment—Morgenthau argued in the 1950s for a massive buildup of conventional forces in Europe to offset the Soviet threat.

Like Kennan, he perceived the Soviet Union's international designs to be less ideologically driven and more in line with the geopolitical aims of traditional Russian imperialism. Also like Kennan, his views found little favor among the cold warriors at the Department of State, who insisted on viewing the superpower confrontation in moralistic terms that



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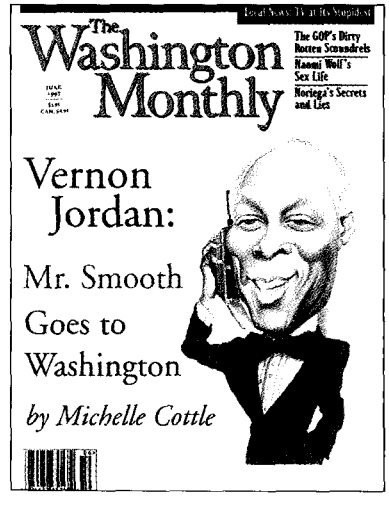


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were anathema to the realist approach shared by both men—terms that allowed the conflict to intensify rapidly to the level of an impassioned ideological crusade. As Morgenthau wrote at the time of the Korean War: "The Truman Doctrine transformed a concrete interest of the United States in a geographically defined part of the world into a moral principle of worldwide validity, to be applied regardless of the limits of American interest and power."

In Morgenthau's view, America in the 1950s had successfully cast off one form of moral idealism—Wilsonianism—merely to succumb to another—anti-communism. "The great issue," he observed, "... is between a crusading foreign policy which is ideologically oriented and a realistic foreign policy emphasizing national interests in terms of a nation's power vis-à-vis other nations." Like all forms of political idealism, anti-communism caused the United States fundamentally to misconstrue the parameters of its own national interest. Third World revolutions were falsely perceived as "communist threats" rather than as movements of national liberation. As a result, the United States soon found itself politically and militarily overextended.

The most egregious instance of this ideologically driven American myopia was the war in Vietnam, an involvement that Morgenthau criticized stridently as early as 1961. Many who were familiar with his work were taken aback by the vehemence of his criticism. They had falsely assumed that a self-professed "realist" would support an aggressive foreign policy, no matter what the cost. In Morgenthau's view, however, the conflagration in Vietnam violated a cardinal rule of international relations: never put yourself in a position from which you cannot retreat without loss of face, and from which you cannot advance without undue risk.

Morgenthau went on to become one of the war's most outspoken critics. In 1966, he engaged in a celebrated debate on the war in the pages of *Look* magazine with his protégé and fellow realist Henry Kissinger (who was then still a professor at Harvard). Nor can there be much doubt that Morgenthau's criticisms found their desired target. After he published an article in *The New York Times Magazine* critical of the war, he was fired from his position as consultant to the Defense Department. Thereafter, at President Johnson's behest, the White House established a "Morgenthau Desk" for the purpose of defaming the scholar.

It is worth emphasizing that Morgenthau's criticism of American involvement in Vietnam was entirely divorced from moral considerations. He was right about Vietnam, but for the wrong reasons. In retrospect, what contributed most to discrediting the international relations paradigm were realism's dubious and incessant justifications of the war in Vietnam. The inability to do justice to the moral dimension of international politics was one of realism's major weaknesses. (In 1946, Morgenthau opposed the Nuremberg trials as an instance of the moralization of politics.)

And realism had other weaknesses, too. It offered very little guidance as to how one might define, with any measure of precision, a concept as amorphous as "the national interest." The concept seemed fatally beset with vagueness—an inadequate basis on which to construct an "empirical" theory of international relations. It was also an invitation to tendentiousness in the analysis of international affairs. As critics of realism have pointed out, in most cases the notion of "the national interest" conceals an ideological bias that favors the interests of ruling elites over the interest of average citizens.

Realism's cynical view of human nature also tended to preclude the good that might accrue from institutions of international law as well as from a politics of human rights. At times, such cynicism blossomed into an ethical and political defeatism. Morgenthau was fond of quoting Burke's maxim that "nothing universal can be rationally affirmed on any moral or any political subject." But this was not an argument, it was a dogma. As Stanley Hoffmann has observed, "Morgenthau has often written as if truth and power were bound to be enemies." Realism raised worldliness almost to the status of wisdom, and in an age of terrible illusions its disillusionment could seem like a great service of reason; but finally realism placed too little faith in the morality of politics, and too much faith in the statesman's capacity to act "responsibly." In this way, realism showed itself to be distinctly unrealistic. ■

# The Storm Before the Calm

*By* Ruth Franklin

## Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska translated by Joanna Trzeciak

(W.W. Norton, 159 pp., $24.95)

It is Wislawa Szymborska's custom to dress up the serious in the costume of comedy. Even her Nobel Lecture began with an *ars poetica* disguised as a joke. "They say that the first sentence in any speech is always the hardest," she said. "Well, that one's behind me." But in fact escape is not so easy, she continued:

> I have a feeling that the sentences to come—the third, the sixth, the tenth, and so on, up to the final line—will be just as hard, since I'm supposed to talk about poetry. I've said very little on the subject—next to nothing, in fact. And whenever I have said anything, I've always had the sneaking suspicion that I'm not very good at it. This is why my lecture will be rather short. Imperfection is easier to tolerate in small doses.

"Imperfection is easier to tolerate in small doses" could be said to be Szymborska's motto. The Nobel Lecture (which appeared in these pages) is titled "The Poet and the World," and it is the imperfect world that she expounds and interprets in her poems, in carefully apportioned and gently administered measures. Her poetry is the antithesis of confessional poetry: Szymborska has never published a poem about her sex life, or her mother, or what she ate for breakfast. When she does write about topics that appear to be personal, it is only as a jumping-off point for a meditation on the human condition.

Her poems are founded on the assumption that hers is a universal voice. "In Szymborska's poetry the 'we' denotes all of us living on this planet now, joined by a common consciousness, a 'post-consciousness,' post-Copernican, post-New-



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tonian, post-Darwinian, post-two-World-Wars, post-crimes-and-inventions-of-the-twentieth-century," Czeslaw Milosz writes in his introduction to *Miracle Fair*. "It is a serious and bold enterprise to venture a diagnosis, that is, to try to say who we are, what we believe in, and what we think." But this is not to say that Szymborska is a poet of abstractions. One of the most distinctive features of her poetry is the way in which she builds from the particular a route to the universal. As she put it in 1976 in "A Large Number," in the collection of the same name:

> Four billion people on this earth,
> but my imagination is the way it's always
> been:
> bad with large numbers.
> It is still moved by particularity.

For Szymborska, such "particularity" can mean almost any of the details of life: a cat's incomprehension of the death of its owner, a man dozing at a poetry reading, a single raindrop "crafted from the Ganges and the Nile / from the ascended frost of a seal's whiskers / from water in broken pots in the cities of Ys and Tyre." Or, as in the chilling "Starvation Camp at Jaslo," an individual conjured out of the murk of historical statistics:

> History rounds off skeletons to the
> nearest zero.
> A thousand and one is still a thousand.
> As if that one weren't there at all:
> an imaginary embryo, empty cradle,
> a primer opened for no one,
> air that laughs and screams and grows,
> stairs for the void running down to the
> garden,
> nobody's place in the ranks.

In her native Poland, where much poetry is "popular"—printed in newspapers, read and discussed—Szymborska's poetry is exceedingly so; and her popularity has followed her to America, where she is one of the few Polish poets to be read by people who are not especially interested in Poland or in poetry. Her style, as much as her subject matter, is responsible for her aura of approachability. The neatly assembled sentences of which her poems are constructed are miniature marvels of precision in a Polish literary tradition famous for lines and constructs of Latinate complexity. She has a special flair for the opening line: "After every war / someone has to clean up"; "I owe a lot / to those I do not love"; "A one-sided relationship is developing quite well / between you and me." (The "you" of this last sentence refers to plants.) These lines are impeccably Szymborska: seemingly straightforward propositions that veer off in an unsettling yet gently humorous direction.

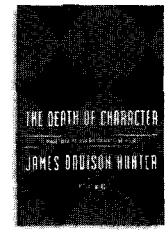
Joanna Trzeciak's translations of Szymborska's poetry have been appearing in magazines for years, and now they have been revised and gathered into *Miracle Fair*, which arrives at the end of a boomlet in translations of Szymborska into English. In 1996, Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh published *View With a Grain of Sand*, a selection of one hundred poems, which they translated exceptionally well. Two years later came *Poems New and Collected 1957-1997*, a nearly comprehensive presentation of Szymborska's work to date; it comprises nearly the entire contents of her seven major volumes of poetry, plus a handful of poems published over the past decade. This is not as many poems as one might expect from a poet who has been publishing for more than fifty years. Szymborska owes her compact style to her own harsh editing of her work, and produces only a few final-draft poems each year. ("So few poems, so much poetry," the critic Stanislaw Balbus has said of her.)

The sixty-one poems in Trzeciak's book do not pretend to be a complete representation of Szymborska's work to date. The main strength of *Miracle Fair*, rather, is its presentation. Trzeciak has grouped the poems in six sections, each devoted to a certain theme: love, war and politics, the natural world, humankind, philosophy, art. The ten or so poems in each section are arranged chronologically. One loses the coherence of reading as a group poems from individual volumes; but one gains a heightened sense of the progression in Szymborska's technique and thought over the years.

It is obligatory for any new translation to present the debuts of a few poems that are being translated for the first time, and Trzeciak has fulfilled her duty in this regard, though it could not have been easy. In their Translators' Note to *Poems New and Collected*, Baranczak and Cavanagh confessed that they had left out just a handful of poems, and those only because of "specific unsurmountable problems of a technical nature involved in the translation of each." It was inevitable that some plucky translator would be unable to resist the challenge implicit in this statement; and Trzeciak proudly includes poems that have never appeared in English before, several of which, she writes, "had been deemed untranslatable."

But there is another reason that a few of these poems will be new to English readers: they are taken from Szymborska's unpublished first volume of poetry, which was rejected by the government as incompatible with the Socialist Realist aesthetic that was gaining prominence at the time, as well as from her first two published books, both of which were deemed compatible with Socialist Realism and published during the early 1950s, the heyday of Stalinism in Poland. Most critics have chosen, benevolently and somewhat condescendingly, to overlook these volumes, arguing that the first is juvenilia and that Szymborska herself does not consider the published ones artistically authentic. And these poems are certainly not to be counted among her finest. Still, it would be ludicrous to ignore the first twelve years of Szymborska's career in an overview of her work, and Trzeciak rightly makes the case for the inclusion of these poems. It is understandable that Polish critics tend to "forget" the work that some of the country's literary heroes produced under Stalinism, but as that period fades further into the past, the "warts and all" approach seems to be gaining a foothold.

SOCREALIZM—AS Socialist Realism was called in Poland—was imposed by Communist Party decree in 1949 and dominated Poland's literary and artistic scene until 1955, when the "thaw" began. Some writers, including the critic Jan Kott and the poet Adam Ważyk, embraced early on the idea of basing literature on Marxist criteria, and advocated a "broad realism" like that of Balzac or Proust; but in general *Socrealizm* was enforced by prescriptions handed down by government officials and so-called "terror-eticians." Avant-garde experimentation, which had thrived in Poland during the interwar period, was strictly forbidden.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The preferred literary form was the "production novel," which usually had as its setting a factory or a collective farm, with all the inherent drama thereof. Poetry was restricted to metered and rhymed verse, which was thought to have the maximum appeal to the proletarian reader.

Many writers were silent during "the period of errors and mistakes," as it later was known. And so in 1956 there was an explosion of poetry, with the delayed debuts of writers such as Zbigniew Herbert and Aleksander Wat. Others escaped abroad, publishing their work in the Polish exile press, which reached a limited readership. And still others devoted themselves to creating literature emblematic of *Socrealizm*, including Tadeusz Borowski, who until then had been known for his unflinchingly testimonial short stories about Auschwitz, the most famous of which is "Ladies and Gentlemen, This Way to the Gas." After producing a steady stream of newspaper and magazine articles extolling the new system, Borowski abruptly committed suicide in 1951, at the age of twenty-nine.

Szymborska was part of a minority: the relatively few writers who tried more or less to continue, under the new restraints, with what they had been doing. In keeping with the usual etiquette of silently overlooking work that was published under *Socrealizm*, most collections of Szymborska's poetry start with her third volume, *Calling Out to Yeti* (1957), which was read as emblematic of the Polish thaw: the poem to which the book's title refers, "Notes from a Nonexistent Himalayan Expedition," is a monologue describing the joys of the world, from Shakespeare to electric lights, to a distant abominable-snowman figure.

Yet Szymborska had been publishing poetry for twelve years by the time *Calling Out to Yeti* appeared. Her first published poem, "I'm searching for a word," appeared in a literary supplement to the Kraków newspaper *Dziennik Polski* in March of 1945. She hoped to publish her first book in 1948, but her poetry was deemed inaccessible and overly preoccupied with the horrors of World War II. Still, she managed to bring out her first collection, *What We Live For*, in 1952, at the height of Stalinism. The following year Szymborska became poetry editor of *Życie Literackie*, one of Poland's most important literary magazines, and in 1954 she published her second book, *Questioning Oneself*.

Many critics, including Milosz, have had a hard time with the propagandistic tendencies of Szymborska's first two volumes. The poems deal largely with political topics. They certainly reflect the anti-Western and anti-capitalist tendencies of the time, though they are not in the same league as the Socialist Realist howlers, with their rhetoric about tractors and fields of grain. In an interview several years ago, Szymborska said that the "mistake" hampering her early writing was that she had tried "to love humankind instead of loving human beings."

Despite any attempts to the contrary, however, it is human beings that Szymborska has loved all along; and her early poems, like those of any poet, are best understood as premature precursors to her later work, not as blots on her record. A good example is "We knew the world backwards and forwards," written in 1945 and included in the volume of early poetry that was never published. It first appeared fifty-five years later, when Szymborska herself chose it to open a Polish collection of her poems:

> We knew the world backwards and
> forwards—
> so small it fit in a handshake,
> so easy it could be described in a smile,
> as plain as the echoes of old truths in a
> prayer.
>
> History did not greet us with triumphant
> fanfare—
> it flung dirty sand in our eyes.
> Ahead of us were distant roads leading
> nowhere,
> poisoned wells, bitter bread.
>
> The spoils of war is our knowledge of the
> world—
> so large it fits in a handshake,
> so hard it could be described in a smile,
> as strange as the echoes of old truths in a
> prayer.

It is quite obvious why this poem was deemed unpublishable at the time, with Socialist Realism just around the corner. And it is almost as obvious why it was not published later—though it should be said that the original possesses a symmetry and a rhythm that do not come through in the clunky lines of Trzeciak's translation. Szymborska's later work would abandon this sort of heavy-handed didacticism for a far more subtle approach, but "We knew the world backwards and forwards" signals the beginning of a preoccupation that has remained with the poet for her entire career. Many later poems can be seen as re-writings of this one, especially "The Turn of the Century," the first poem that Szymborska published after the declaration of martial law in Poland in 1981. It is too long to quote in its entirety, but here are the first two stanzas:

> It was supposed to be better than the rest,
> our twentieth century.
> But it won't have time to prove it.
> Its years are numbered,
> its step unsteady,
> its breath short.
>
> Already too much has happened
> that was not supposed to happen,
> and what was to come
> has yet to come.

The poems share a common theme—simply put, that war and other forms of political violence force us to re-evaluate our most basic assumptions about the world in which we live. The first poem derives much of its power from the literal reversal of tropes, echoing the reversal of expectations, that occurs with the third stanza's repetition of the first. But while the first poem states its "old truths" unblinkingly and rather roughly, the later poem is exquisite in its indirectness: there is no need even to name what is being referred to, since by now we are all far too familiar with the tragedies of the twentieth century. In fact, if it were necessary to name what "happened that was not supposed to happen"—one hears in these lines an echo of Paul Celan's oblique formulation of the Holocaust as simply "what happened"—the impact of the poem would be lost, since it rests on the assumption of humanity's universal grief.

THE STRUCTURE OF Trzeciak's book, and the chronological ordering of poems within sections, allow earlier poems to be read together with later poems in a kind of counterpoint, emphasizing the deepening of Szymborska's expression over the years as she refines her technique. In the mid-career poem "A Thank-You Note," for example, she acknowledges her debt to her loved ones indirectly, by celebrating the more casual, less weighty relationships she has with those whom she does not love:

> Between rendezvous and letter
> no eternity passes,
> only a few days or weeks.
>
> Our trips always turn out well:
> concerts are enjoyed,
> cathedrals toured,
> landscapes in focus.
>
> And when seven rivers and mountains
> come between us,
> they are the rivers and mountains
> found on any map....

Turning the clichés of love poetry inside out, Szymborska uses the signs of love's absence to define its presence. There is a soft note of teasing in her reference to the "eternity" of "a few days or weeks" when



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one is waiting to hear from a beloved; and the rivers and mountains, fixed geographically, are comforting in their very prosaicness. But finally there is a quite deliberate emptiness in these stanzas, a mournful banality that is the mark of lovelessness. There is far more to life than placid encounters and pleasant scenery, and satisfaction with such half-measures bespeaks a limited mind and heart.

The recent short poem "Negative," in which Szymborska imagines a frame of film as a window to the world of the dead, is one of Szymborska's elegies on the death of her companion. It recapitulates the idea of absence and love, but comes at it from quite a different perspective:

> In a grayish sky
> a cloud even more gray
> with a black outline from the sun.
>
> On the left, that is, on the right,
> a white cherry branch with black
> blossoms.
>
> On your dark face light shadows.
> You have sat down at a small table
> and laid your grayed hands on it.
>
> You seem like a ghost
> trying to summon the living.
>
> (Because I'm still counted among them,
> I should appear to him and tap:
> good night, that is, good morning,
> farewell, that is, hello.
> Not begrudging him questions to any
> answer
> if they concern life,
> that is, the storm before the calm.)

Playing on the commonplace yet surreal image of the negative, Szymborska slowly builds reversal upon reversal, starting with the obvious—a white branch with black cherry blossoms, a dark face with light shadows—and moving toward the metaphysical—good night instead of good morning, questions instead of answers—to reach the poem's startling last line, itself the inversion of a cliché. Each line carries more and more weight until, at the end, the poem's true subject is revealed: life itself, "the storm before the calm."

"To be frank, [Szymborska's] is a very grim poetry," Milosz writes in his introduction to *Miracle Fair*, comparing her outlook on life to the "despairing vision" of Philip Larkin. To be sure, the two poets have certain stylistic similarities: both are among the plainest and most lucid writers of their generation; and both play with traditional forms to create a poetry that manages to feel modern within the very constraints of its formalism. Yet it is hard to imagine two poets further apart philosophically. At the heart of Larkin's poetry is an impervious misanthropy, while Szymborska is one of the great humanists of our time. Milosz himself acknowledges the depths of the "pity and compassion" for humankind that informs Szymborska's work.

Szymborska also differs from Larkin in her mischievous, whimsical sense of humor. Even when the British poet is fooling around ("They fuck you up, your mum and dad. . . ."), he is always grimly serious at heart; but Szymborska is capable of indulging her sheer delight in the world. "The Silence of Plants" is a fine example of her distinctive comedy:

> A one-sided relationship is developing
> quite well
> between you and me.
>
> I know what a leaf, petal, kernel, cone,
> and stem are,
> and I know what happens to you in April
> and December.
>
> Though my curiosity is unrequited,
> I gladly stoop for some of you
> and for others I crane my neck. . . .
>
> Just ask and I will explain as best I can:
> what it is to see through eyes,
> why my heart beats,
> and how come my body is unrooted.
>
> But how does someone answer questions
> never posed
> when on top of that
> she is such an utter nobody to you?. . .

Szymborska is obviously not the first poet to write a poem about a plant, or even to address a plant in a poem; but it is her unusual inversion of the tired "flower poem" that makes "The Silence of Plants" so original and so engaging. Her poems exult in connections: between people, between people and animals, and here even such a relationship as exists between people and plants. She celebrates the most ordinary actions—stopping or craning one's neck—as expressions of this relationship; she longs to explain to the plants what a person is, seeing herself through a plant's eyes, as it were (describing her body as "unrooted," for example). At the poem's conclusion, there is a sadness in the acknowledgment that, needless to say, dialogue with plants is impossible; but it is the joy in life required even to seek such a dialogue that dominates.

Unfortunately, the poems in *Miracle Fair* are more representative of Szymborska's gravity than of her whimsy. This may be a result of the restrictions imposed by Trzeciak's thematic groupings, which preclude the selection of poems that do not fit neatly within the various categories. The book gives a good sense of her general philosophy and of her idiom, but what is missing are the measured explosions of charm and delight that punctuate her body of work. Consider "In Praise of Dreams," a series of couplets describing fantasies, from the most outlandish to the most mundane (here in Baranczak and Cavanagh's translation):

> In my dreams
> I paint like Vermeer van Delft.
>
> I speak fluent Greek
> and not just with the living.
>
> I drive a car
> that does what I want it to. . . .

Or "The Onion," which celebrates the apparent perfection of that vegetable, in contrast to messy, incoherent humanity (again in Baranczak and Cavanagh's version):

> The onion, now that's something else.
> Its innards don't exist.
> Nothing but pure onionhood
> fills this devout onionist.
> Oniony on the inside,
> onionesque it appears. . . .

In the original, this poem takes advantage of the capabilities of Polish, an inflected language, to produce every possible variation on *cebula*, the word for onion, resulting in a tangled tongue-twister of "c"s and "cz"s. (The lines above give as accurate a reproduction of this as is possible in English.) It is impossible to recite this ode to the onion with a straight face.

And again the ending packs a surprise. Here is the last stanza:

> Nature's rotundest tummy,
> its greatest success story,
> the onion drapes itself in its
> own aureoles of glory.
> We hold veins, nerves, and fat,
> secretions' secret sections.
> Not for us such idiotic
> onionoid perfections.

In the translation, it is almost possible to overlook the word "idiotic," tucked in at the end of the penultimate line; but not in the original, the last two lines of which are "*I jest nam odmówiony/idiotyzm doskonałości*," literally, "And we are denied/the idiocy of perfection." Although human beings are by design unable to achieve the perfect coherence and symmetry of the onion, such superficial perfection is idiotic, based on nothing—like the poem itself. Imperfection, we must conclude, is far more interesting. ■



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# WASHINGTON DIARIST

## Home Base

UNDER GEORGE W. BUSH, a fundamental change has already taken place in American foreign policy: The foreign world is again, well, foreign. Gone is the Clintonian emotional expansiveness that took in friend and foe alike, displaying a false identification with places near and far. That neurosis about acceptance, that compulsive need for seduction, drove Bill Clinton and took him everywhere Air Force One could land. There is nothing of this in Bush. The man's ease with himself is, in part, an ease with home and country and familiar verities.

NO, IT IS NOT TOO EARLY TO MAKE this kind of call. Those who predict that, with time, President Bush will take to the road and succumb to foreign temptation are wrong. A different wind blows, with a different judgment about the world beyond the water's edge. Consider this passage in the president's big speech in early May calling for national missile defense: "Like Saddam Hussein, some of today's tyrants are gripped by an implacable hatred of the United States of America. They hate our friends. They hate our values. They hate democracy and freedom and individual liberty. Many care little for the lives of their own people." This kind of moral clarity harks back to Ronald Reagan: The world outside is a big place, and its values are not always America's. There are things that the presidential Rolodex cannot fix—something Bush senior also did not understand. There are matters that cannot be wished away on a presidential visit to Beijing or to the Gaza Strip.

IT WAS ODD, THAT CLINTONIAN EMpathy for the foreign world—and false. It sprang from many sources and had many justifications. Clinton was "the globalization president," his admirers never wearied of reminding us. The world outside was made of potential consumers, Internet users, and, of course, campaign donors. Men and women in a chat room could not be dangerous. Everywhere from Beijing to Ramallah, Clinton told us, the atavisms were being banished. A new age of commerce, a Pax Kapital, was dawning; the man saw himself as an evangelist of that global age. Clinton was sure that nations that trade with each other would renounce war with each other; he accepted that reading of history at face value. It was cut to his own needs and temperament, of a piece with the utopianism that seized the 1990s—the new economy dispensing with the laws of profit and valuation, the new politics consigning history's furies to the past, and, of course, the confessionalism that was the principal cultural product of the era.

CLINTON STAKED A GREAT DEAL ON the Internet, offering it as proof that borders had fallen and enmities had dissipated. "In the new century," he said, "liberty will be spread by cell phone and cable modem." China's masters would be tempted to control this new technology, but they were destined to fail. "Good luck! That's sort of like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall," he proclaimed. The false sense of security and the refusal to accept "otherness" and cultural difference deluded and misled Clinton. The Palestine National Council in Gaza, before which he appeared and offered the closest thing to an American Balfour Declaration for a Palestinian state, was, in Clinton's fantasy, a Palestinian equivalent of the U.S. Congress. He knew nothing of the cast of characters assembled before him. But he had his salesman's confidence, a sublime confidence that history would break his way.

AS HIS TROUBLES AND SEXUAL SCANdals mounted at home, Clinton grew more desperate for foreign acceptance. He knew the foreign world was more forgiving of such foibles. He journeyed to foreign lands often, particularly toward the end of his presidency. Clinton himself told us that he pursued a deal at Wye River between Yasir Arafat and Benjamin Netanyahu in late 1998 as a form of penance for the Lewinsky affair: foreign policy as psychobiography. Bush, by contrast, does not need to "bond" with Arafat or to seek validation from peoples beyond. To the extent a man's character can be discerned, Bush seems blissfully free of the urge to fake an intimacy with strangers. He will not seek personal deliverance through quick fixes for age-old troubles.

WHICH IS GOOD, BECAUSE THE CLINtonian vision has been debunked. China hasn't clicked its way out of authoritarianism or cast its political ambitions aside. Chinese nationalism has replaced communism among the young. And the crowds in Gaza and Ramallah have waged nothing short of an insurrection against everything Clinton thought they adhered to. Clinton never really knew Arafat or his ways. It was hubris to think he did—his peculiarly parochial tendency to step into a foreign world and think its riddles and mysteries would yield to a stranger's touch. It was the Davos fix—the pop internationalism bred at the annual meetings of the World Economic Forum. From the "commanding heights" of Davos, Clinton and the crowd dispensed with the messiness of the world. It is unlikely that the Davos types will soon see Bush in their midst. The Davos happiness is not his own, nor is the Davos talk about a "borderless" world.

DON'T EXPECT BUSH TO JOURNEY TO Gaza anytime soon either. He will, in the main, stay away from the Israeli-Palestinian cauldron. Defying those who thought he would be his father's heir, he appears to have an intuitive understanding of Israelis' disappointment with Arafat, a fundamental recognition of the simple, unadorned truth that Israel cannot negotiate against the background of a deadly insurrection waged by the Palestinian National Authority. Clinton's way was to presume that he offered Israel "tough love" and was thus entitled to demand all sorts of sacrifices from Israel's leaders. Bush entertains no such presumption. There is no redemptionism in him, no expectation that the historical and moral lines of this tenacious conflict can be blurred or that an American president can offer his own "empathy" as some antidote to trouble.

CLINTON WAS THE PERFECT SALESman—seeing what he wanted to see, missing so much, misreading so much. Around him gathered a national security team of trade lawyers and sunny optimists sure of the ascendancy of American values. Instinctively, Bush knows better. In a peculiar way, his mix of "humility" abroad and his wary uneasiness about challenges to American security are true to our age. The 1990s were a fool's paradise, a lucky run lived in the shadow of the twin triumphs of the cold war and the Gulf war. We have exhausted these victories, and there has been no technological deliverance from the passions of history. In his very Americanism, and in his acceptance of the fact that China and Russia are great potential rivals to American primacy, Bush has already paid the foreign world the compliment it deserves: the recognition that there are nemeses of America's power and purposes out there—and that alien lands breed their own truths.

FOUAD AJAMI



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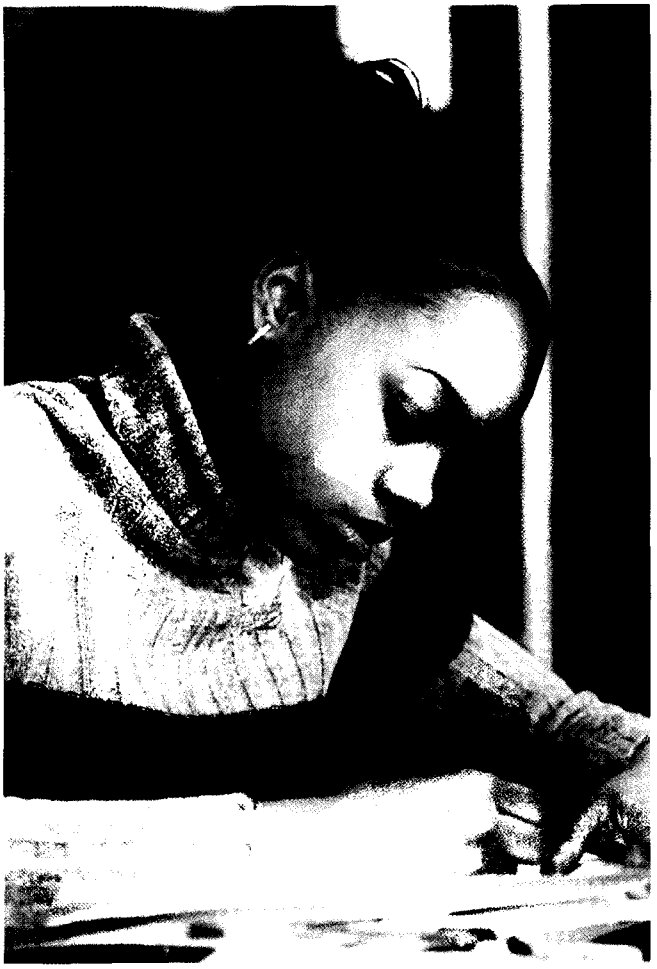
# The National Education Crisis For Low-Income Students



The Black Alliance for Educational Options is motivated by a national crisis in education involving low-income students, mostly of color.

According to one recent report involving new national test scores: "Minority students performed significantly worse [than whites] with 63 percent of African-American youngsters and 58 percent of Hispanics unable to demonstrate basic skills. Just one-tenth of Black and 13 percent of Hispanic 4th graders were considered proficient in reading."

BAEO agrees with Hugh B. Price, president of the National Urban League, who said: "These [scores] are totally unacceptable..."

BAEO believes parents need more educational options, including: charter schools; home schooling; public-private partnerships; tax-supported vouchers; privately financed scholarships to private schools; tuition tax credits; and innovations in existing public schools.

Recent developments highlight successes and obstacles faced by supporters of charter schools and public-private partnerships.

Two years after converting to a charter school, San Francisco's Edison Charter Academy raised second grade reading scores by 12 national percentile points, second grade math scores by 36 percentile points, fifth grade reading by 11 percentile points and fifth grade math scores by 17 percentile points. Edison manages the school in a public-private partnership with the San Francisco public school system.

**Parental School Choice is Widespread — Unless You're Poor**

Despite such gains, a Wall Street Journal editorial said that "[A] new [San Francisco] school board is trying to revoke the charter of Edison Academy, which has 503 students. Joan Walsh, news editor for the liberal publication Salon.com, calls the board's actions 'an ideological crusade to close a school that's worked miracles with poor black and Latino students.' By emphasizing results rather than red tape [Walsh] concludes that 'it's almost unheard of to see the level of improvement Edison has achieved in two years'...."

Another example of resistance to change comes from Pennsylvania. There, says the Center for Education Reform, "The battle is less over what's best for kids than over what's best for the education establishment...[A] confidential Pennsylvania State Education Association report [revealed by researcher Mike Antonucci]...proposed strategies for unionizing charter teachers, noting 'If we lose our grip on the labor supply to the education industry, we will bargain from a position of weakness...If we want to maintain our influence, our ability to do ANYTHING, we must make sure that education remains a unionized industry.'"

BAEO's national public information campaign will continue to highlight the potential for our children of expanding parent options. We hope individuals and organizations who resist the expansion of parent options will reconsider their approach.

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